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Durham
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Explaining Changing Trends in Political Participation in Britain between 1983 and 2015

School of Government and International Affairs

MA by Research

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2016/17

Word Count: 49, 902

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Contents:

Introduction.....	Pg 1
Structure.....	Pg 12
Chapter 1 - Literature Review.....	Pg 16
Chapter 2 - Theory.....	Pg 40
Social Capital.....	Pg 42
Cognitive Mobility.....	Pg 49
General Incentives.....	Pg 55
Chapter 4 - Data & Methodology.....	Pg 63
Chapter 5 - Social Capital.....	Pg 69
Results.....	Pg 70
Trends.....	Pg 80
Analysis.....	Pg 83
Chapter 6 - Cognitive Mobility.....	Pg 94
Results.....	Pg 95
Trends.....	Pg 107
Analysis.....	Pg 110
Chapter 7 - General Incentives.....	Pg 121

Results.....	Pg 125
Trends.....	Pg 141
Analysis.....	Pg 147
Conclusion.....	Pg 156
Bibliography.....	Pg 171

Introduction:

The way in which citizens choose to express themselves in the political realm has changed dramatically in recent decades and clear trends have developed whereby voter turnout, party membership and other forms of institutionalised political engagement are caught in a downward spiral compared to innovative ways of civic engagement appearing to be on the rise across most liberal democracies (Dalton, 2008; Inglehart & Catterberg, 2002; Klingeman & Fuchs, 1995; Norris, 2002; Pattie et al., 2004). This thesis will therefore use the three theories of Social Capital, Cognitive Mobility and General Incentives in an attempt to assess the causes of, and ultimately explain, these aforementioned trends. The three theories each take a very different approach and will therefore offer a broad spectrum of potential explanations.

This section will first outline the need to understand these changes in political participation and specifically in the British case. Second, it will briefly look as to where this thesis will fit and attempt to add to the current body of literature, although this will obviously be done much more thoroughly as part of a comprehensive literature review. Finally, the full structure of the thesis will be outlined in detail with the contents of each chapter discussed.

First, it is necessary to state that it is always important to understand the determinants of turnout and thus there is a broad range of literature which looks to explain differences across elections, countries and time periods which in turn aids in the challenge of explaining the driving forces behind turnout itself. Academic interest therefore applies not only to countries which suffer from low turnout but equally those with relatively large turnout; high turnout is not necessarily good a priori and vice versa with low turnout, understanding the reasons for these differing levels of turnout is what matters most. In order to understand the reasons behind the changes in participation it is first necessary to understand the determinants of them.

Turnout at British General Elections has fallen from a high of 84% in 1953 to a low of 59% in 2001 where turnout has not passed 70% for over a decade. However there is growing line of thought that the decline in electoral turnout is not due to an increased level of apathy within the British electorate but rather that current trends should be viewed as an evolution of political engagement where people are choosing to engage in the political realm through other means. While a healthy democracy will have both institutionalised forms of participation such as voting as well as non-institutionalised forms such as signing a petition or attending a demonstration, the balance between these is crucial to its success. This thesis will, through the aforementioned three theories, therefore look to understand this evolution through both of these trends.

To begin, and as will be discussed subsequently, any democratic system relies on the ideal that all citizens who live under its rule have the real ability to have their say within it. The downward trend in electoral turnout increasingly brings this into question. Therefore any fall in turnout at General Elections inevitably raises serious questions about the health of British democracy, which has up to the modern day generally been considered a leading nation in this sense. As was eloquently stated by Butler and Stokes (1969:26); “Blurred ideas of popular sovereignty and universal suffrage are so interwoven into prevailing conceptions of British government that the obligation to vote becomes almost an aspect of the citizen’s national identity”. Such a statement makes the electoral decline even more interesting in the British case. However, the decline in itself is not necessarily concerning without understanding the causes of this. Should citizens choose not to vote as they are happy with the status quo, this would not necessarily pose an issue. However, a perceived lack of choice for voters would pose more of a problem, yet both would see the same result of declining electoral turnout.

The recent decline in electoral turnout that has been experienced in Britain over recent decades may however potentially be considered concerning firstly due to its very nature by which there are less people taking up their democratic right to vote and thus have their say in how the country to run and the affect it will have on their day to day lives. However, second, is the fact that not only is this crucial form of participation on the decline it equally harbours huge amounts of inequality in terms of participation and thus the democratic nature of the system as a whole begins to be questioned. As electoral turnout declines there is a very unambiguous trend by which this also becomes increasingly unequal turnout where those least likely to turn out in an election are overwhelmingly drawn from the least privileged groups within society. While the decline in turnout can be observed across all social groupings, it is most pronounced in those groups which possess the lowest incomes (Lever, 2010). This creates a vicious and potentially dangerous circle in formal political participation; those who do not vote are then not represented by the parties and policies on offer and thus this only serves to exacerbate this problem. The most marginal members of society are further marginalised by this process. It would not surprise many to learn that voting turnout has been on the decline in most modern democracies since WWII, however what would be far less well known is the strong association that this has with unequal turnout and the significance of this relationship. As discussed, this overall decline in turnout has the potential to pose a broad worry for the British political system and the democratic ideals which it works under, however the manner in which turnout is falling furthers this concern and is thus potentially an area on which any policy implications will have to focus in terms of reversing this decline and stabilising voter turnout.

Hence it is important to attempt to understand the causes of these trends and what can either be done to begin to reverse the decline in electoral turnout or alternatively begin to integrate other forms of political engagement, where participation is on the rise, into the current formal

political system in order to assess both of the issues mentioned above in terms of declining formal participation and the growing inequality within participation that this creates in Britain. Someone signing a petition or attending a demonstration does not have the same formal political recognition as voting. The fact that people are increasingly choosing to engage in the former is therefore concerning. Citizens are still expressing their views politically but there is a huge ambiguity as to the level which these are recognised and certainly doesn't provide the very formal result of casting a ballot.

Further to the obvious benefits of broadening political engagement and participation, and returning to Young's (2000) definition of a legitimate democratic system, is the idea that the current trends could work to reduce these aforementioned issues of inequality which currently surround political engagement. As alluded to, it is a widely proven and accepted fact of political participation that in terms of traditional, or institutionalised, forms there are very unequal levels of engagement as defined by education, class, gender and age (Parry et al., 1992; Teorell et al., 2007a; Verba et al., 1995). For example, it has been suggested that the participation gap as regards both age and gender has the potential to be closed by means of these less traditional forms of participation. Stolle and Hooghe (2005) hypothesise that this form of participation has the ability to mobilise women more effectively in the political process, especially in comparison to electoral politics and participation in political parties. Similarly, acts such as attending a demonstration or signing a protest have the potential to engage younger citizens in politics (Teorell et al., 2007a) whom are almost universally shown to engage less in politics than their older counterparts. From this perspective the current trends have the potential to be seen as positive.

From the discussion thus far it is clear that any change in the way which citizens choose to express themselves in the political sphere will have potentially very wide ranging consequences for the democratic system of that particular country. As mentioned the ability

of citizens to express themselves is highly important because, as stated by Young (2000, pp. 5-6), the legitimacy of any democratic political system depends to some extent on the ability and opportunities available to each and every citizen who will be affected by the decisions made within this political system to have their voices heard within this. A changing in the structure of political expression as has been experienced both in Britain and across much of the liberal world may in turn equally require an adaptation of the political structure itself in order to allow this necessary expression of its citizens. A democratic system which does not offer the appropriate opportunities for all citizens to have their voices heard and contribute in the political realm on a wide range of topics and issues, all of which will directly or indirectly affect them, is no democratic system at all.

Academic interest in political participation, both in terms of voting as well as through other less traditional forms of engagement, is dominated by two strands of opposing democratic theory. Britain, in recent times, has seen a transition between the two and the causes of this process, which have pushed electoral turnout down and increased engagement in alternative forms of participation, is what this thesis will look to explain. Britain was previously characterised by the theory of Elite Competition which is associated with the “responsible government” school of thought (e.g Schumpeter, 1950; Berelson, Lazarfeld & McPhee, 1954; Almond & Verba, 1963) with the focus here upon the ideas of elite leadership and a “thin” form of democracy where there is limited citizen participation within this. The theory recognises the “constitutional and practical limits on the effective range of political decision”, whereby voting in competitive elections, such as a General Election, by a “poorly informed and/or emotional electorate” may be seen as the maximum exercise of citizenship and a method by which elite decision making can be legitimised (Held 1996:197). In this sense, it is best to limit public involvement in order to ensure effective and stable government, which in turn then bolsters public support for a democratic political order. Hence, such a conception of

society takes an extremely pessimistic view of both the intellectual and moral capacities of citizens and further to this, it is argued that there is quite limited potential for any improvement within this. On this basis, it is taken that the lack of participation among citizens can generally be considered to be a good thing. While such a model of citizen participation may have previously been applicable in Britain, this thesis will show and thus work on the premise that this line of thinking is no longer relevant in the British case.

However, recent trends have meant that Britain is now much better characterised by the theory of Participatory Citizenship which offers a much better insight into current political participation in modern day Britain with a wide range of advocates of this theory including liberal democratic theorists such as Mill (1859, 1861), Pateman (1970) and Macpherson (1977) as well as those from the “Reasoning Public” school of thought including Neumann (1986) and Lupia, McCubbins and Popkin (2000). The key ideas within this theory are those of “untidy” governance and “strong” democracy, thus requiring extensive citizen involvement in the political process. As discussed by Held (1996:271) such a participatory society has an open institutional system with “direct participation of citizens in the regulation of the key institutions of society”, including the workplace as well as the local community. In this type of society voting by knowledgeable and civic minded individuals provides the minimum expression of citizenship, in direct contrast to the aforementioned Elite Competition Theory where voting offers the maximum of political expression. The benefits of living in a society with widespread involvement in political life such as this include government orientated benefits by promoting effective, open and responsive governance as well as more citizen focused benefits such as bolstered political interest, political knowledge and feelings of efficacy and interpersonal trust. Under this conception of society, there is a very optimistic view of citizens and their potential to engage positively and actively in society through a range of political activities which is far from restricted to merely voting

once every five years in a General Election. Citizens are offered the chance to make a wide variety of positive contributions politically and further to do so in an environment where participation creates a positive feedback loop whereby good citizenship begets better citizenship and hence in direct contrast to the view taken by the theory of Elite Competition. It is not to say that these forms of participation that citizens are choosing to engage in are in any way new, with Friedman (1999) pointing out that petitions and consumer boycotts were in fact present as far back as the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The distinction is not therefore a time based one but rather one based firmly on the conventionality of them or revolve around the issue of institutionalisation as stated by Barnes and Kasse (1979).

Traditional, or alternatively conventional, forms of participation are those which are closely related to the formal electoral process such as voting or being a member of a political party and it is these which are reducing. On the other hand, non-conventional forms of participation are those which tend to sit outside the political system, such as a demonstration or petition, and it is these which are on the rise both in Britain as well as across almost all modern democracies. Both types of engagement ultimately attempt to influence political decisions but as discussed each goes about this in a very different way.

This thesis suggests Britain has evolved from the former to the latter. In line with this transition, there has been a shift in the research on political participation to include other forms of engagement and thus expand the field beyond that of just the electoral arena. The distinction that is often made here in order to distinguish this newer generation of studies is a conceptual one and again returns to the contrast between forms of participation that are considered “conventional” and “elite supporting” such as the act of voting as opposed to those which are “unconventional” and “elite challenging” (Barnes et al., 1979; Inglehart, 1983; Dalton, 2002: chps. 3-4). There is a complete spectrum of activities which fall under this banner of “unconventional” however, ranging from what may be thought of as mild, legal

forms of protest, such as signing a petition or joining a boycott of certain goods or services in order to push a political agenda, through to what would be considered strong, potentially illegal forms, such as rallies and demonstrations where there is a genuine risk of damage to property and physical violence. Typically very few respondents engage, or more likely, are unwilling to admit they engage, in the stronger forms of such unconventional activities and thus are often asked about protest potential, that is, how likely it is that they might perform a particular activity (Barnes et al., 1979; Jennings and Van Deth, 1990).

One of the very few areas where there is any degree of agreement between these two theories regards what ‘political participation’ consists of as this is an area where there is substantial consensus. Each of the theories conceptualises political participation as a voluntary activity done by an individual either acting alone or with others. Political participation is a means by which citizens express their political attitudes, beliefs and opinions and thus requires resources or skills, conveys information to public officials, and is purposive, that is, in its attempts to achieve goals or implement policies. Hence political participation can be said to have four main elements – actions, citizens, politics and influence – and encompasses a wide range of activities (Brady, 1999:739). It is clear that both forms of engagement fit this definition.

One suggestion as to the causes of the recent trends is that such non-institutionalised or unconventional forms of political engagement are simply more compatible with the demands and lifestyles of a new generation of citizens whom have been described as “monitorial”, “post-materialist” and “critical” by a number of scholars including Schudson (1999), Inglehart (1997) and Norris (1999) respectively. What is consistent across each of these descriptions is that such citizens remain interested in politics and the political system, potentially more so than was the case previously, however it is merely the way in which they choose to express this which has evolved. First, Monitorial Citizens, as described by the likes

of Schudson (1999), are ones whom are still interested in politics and will thus participate in political life when they consider this to be necessary; however they will not tend to join traditional political institutions such as political parties for example (Hooghe & Dejaeghere, 2007). Further to this Li and Marsh (2008) posit that while such individuals will integrate elements of political decisions into their everyday lifestyle decisions, they will usually refrain from engaging in formal political structures. On a very similar note, the Post-Materialist theory suggests that citizens choose more individualistic forms of engagement within the political realm where they look to carefully avoid enforced commitments such as fixed membership structures or any form of party politics (Inglehart, 1997). The final of these three descriptions of a new generation of citizens comes from Norris (1999, 2002) who claims that not only are citizens still supportive of the democratic system, but even more so than ever before, yet they have become more critical of the way in which it is currently functioning, hence the associated name. As a result of this scepticism, citizens still wish to engage in politics, but not through the means of traditional party politics as may have been done previously.

However, what is not revealed by either of the strands of democratic theory or the various descriptions of new citizens discussed previously is as to how these trends have come about and what the driving factors are behind them. As discussed, over recent decades British society has moved from one which was largely characterised by Elite Competition Theory where minimal political engagement was almost encouraged, with voting providing the maximum, and virtually only, form of political engagement, through to a society which can be considered far more in line with a model of Participatory Citizenship. Political participation is now available through a plethora of channels and the political sphere is far more prevalent in the average citizens' day to day life with them possessing the appropriate skills, understanding and willingness to engage in these different modes of engagement. This

is what this thesis will address. The two trends together, comprise this evolution and thus using the theories of Social Capital, Cognitive Mobilisation and General Incentives to understand these, will in turn assist in understanding the evolution between these two opposing forms of society.

Thus the issue which this thesis will address however is not which of these theories provides the best fit for modern day British society, the current literature confirms this to increasingly be the latter, but rather to understand how this change and progression has come about and what the driving forces behind it are. It is necessary to understand the causal factors which have led to this change, rather than merely the observable outcomes of this, in order to be able to consider what the best way to move forward is in terms of encouraging broad engagement in the political system and ensuring the democratic ideals of society continue to persist. Without this degree of understanding it is impossible to assess whether the current trends will ultimately prove problematic for the democratic system or create policies by which these potential concerns can be appropriately addressed. Hence, this is what this thesis will look to achieve; understand the causes of the current trends in British political participation, assess any concerns which arise as a result of this and then if necessary what can be done to address these through policy creations. As alluded to, sociological variables, with the notable exception of age, are of only marginal relevance in terms of explaining turnout both in a single election as well as in explaining changes across elections over time. Thus it is not possible to attribute the decline in British electoral turnout to changes in the British demographic in terms of factors such as class, gender and ethnicity as these move far too slowly to explain changes from one election to the next and even trends over a ten or twenty year period. Therefore in order to explain these trends and the overall evolution between these two opposing forms of society, it is necessary to consider the three theories of Social Capital, Cognitive Mobility and General Incentives respectively and then in turn

assess to what extent each possesses any explanatory value in terms of understanding the trends that have been observed in British political participation whereby voting turnout at General Elections has experienced a steady decline whereas other forms of participation have experienced an increase in engagement. The Social Capital model works from a resourced based account of participation whereas the latter two models would be categorised as choice or knowledge based models and thus this broad range of potential explanatory theories will offer the broadest possible range of options and variables to explain the given trends.

Each of the three theories approaches the issue of explaining political participation in a very different and distinct manner. First, the Social Capital Model emphasizes generalised societal trust, involvement with social organisations and similarly the networks that people develop through these organisations, whether that be at work, socially or in any other environment. The greater this social involvement, the greater an individual's propensity to engage will politics will be, with this applying across all forms of engagement. Second, the Cognitive Mobilisation Model focuses on the ability of political actors to engage with political information and their ability to assess this and then in turn participate as they choose in the political sphere. This suggests citizens can assess the potency of different forms of engagement and thus in turn decide how to engage based upon this. Finally, the General Incentives Model supplements and adds to a broad Downsian style cost-benefit analysis with other variables and incentives being included in this such as the effect of believing there is a need to do one's democratic duty or alternative the effect of social norms within the environment an individual finds themselves. It is this calculation which citizens will use when deciding whether or not to engage politically.

Structure:

As for the layout of the thesis, it will first provide a comprehensive review of the relevant current literature and contemporary research. This will begin with a broad discussion of what the literature says as regards voting turnout and the variables which have been shown to be significant within this field and thus revolve around the pioneering work of both Powell and Jackman, who have led the research in this field and directed it and its progress over the last few decades. Following this, it will then be necessary to consider the slightly newer branch of research on political participation, which regards forms of participation other than voting and the reasons why they have grown in popularity and prevalence, such as the influence of the media. Finally this chapter will offer a discussion of the current literature regarding the three theories which will subsequently be tested by this thesis in order to understand these trends.

Chapter 2 will then provide a much deeper discussion of Social Capital, Cognitive Mobility and General Incentives theories respectively, which will include both how each theory originated and evolved as well as creating a more holistic picture of them by assessing the criticisms and rebuttals of each in turn. As part of this several hypotheses will form from this in respect to each theory and then these will in turn form the basis for the later analysis.

After this, in Chapter 3, a short outline of how the analysis will be broadly undertaken within the thesis will be provided and this will look to explain the chosen data set, the reasoning behind this and the benefits it provides. Second it will then move to detail the nature of exactly how the theories will be assessed statistically with regressions and the approach taken within this which will include both confirmation of statistical significance as well as matching this to the relevant trends in order to confirm any explanatory power of a theory.

The next three chapters, following the broad outline of this statistical approach, will consist of each of the three aforementioned theories respectively. These will begin with a process of

building upon the theory which has been detailed previously and from here discussing how in turn this will be operationalised and thus how the analysis will be undertaken specifically for that particular theory. This will be followed by the results of the statistical analysis and then a discussion of these and any significance they may hold. In order to confirm any explanatory power a theory may hold the relevant trends will then be considered along with how the statistical analysis speaks to this. Once this has been done it will be possible to return to the aforementioned hypotheses and in turn either support or falsify each of these. For example, as will be discussed in much greater detail subsequently, in the case of Cognitive Mobility, it is necessary both for educational attainment to prove statistically significant as well as there to have been an appropriate change in this over the relevant time period.

Firstly, Social Capital, as outlined by Putnam will be measured by considering social trust and individuals networks within society. From these results it is only possible to offer limited support to Social Capital in terms of its ability to explain the recent trends in British political participation. The fall in both social trust and the networks people have around them assists in explaining the decline in electoral turnout, yet fails to explain the increase in other forms of political participation. Therefore they only offer limited policy implications as well and merely suggesting that any policy which will reduce social divisions and promote cohesion, such as education or community work, will at the very least help to reduce the decline in turnout even if it may not actually reverse this trend.

Second, Cognitive Mobility will be measured by looking at the three variables of educational attainment, the degree to which someone considers politics to be too complicated for people like themselves and levels of support for political parties. The trends observed here and the nature of the relationship between these variables offers the best explanation of the two trends at hand where turnout at General Elections is on the decline compared to engagement in other forms of politics being on the rise. Given this successful explanation the implications of these

results are hugely important and suggest that education is key in political participation across the board. A policy which increases either educational participation or attainment will help to improve civic life and broadly serve to improve the strength of political participation.

Finally, General Incentives will be measured following the model outline offered by Clarke et al. (2004), where each incentive will be measured independently before moving to build the full model. Unfortunately, this model offers very little overall insight and is therefore potentially the least useful of the three. The full General Incentives model originally offers little insight into declining voter turnout, however when this is refined to resemble more of a Selective Incentives Model, it gains some explanatory power. On the other hand, neither a full or refined General Incentives Model can provide any explanatory value on the second trend of increased engagement in alternative forms of participation.

Despite this, it is possible to take something from these results in terms of policy implications, particularly in terms of the results on System Benefits, which prove to be positively significant on both trends. The more a citizen believes that it is everyone's duty to vote in an election, the more likely it is that they will have voted in the last General Election as well as engaged in other forms of political participation. This therefore returns to an almost Social Capital type of thinking where it is necessary to increase peoples civic duty and in turn this will impact the degree to which they agree that it is every citizens duty to vote in an election. Hence, the results for General Incentives once again point to a need to look to increase both educational participation as well as attainment as a way of broadly increasing political participation.

The thesis will conclude by summing up the findings of the three preceding chapters and showing that while each of the three theories has something to say, Cognitive Mobility offers the best understanding of recent trends and the transition between the two forms of society.

While each of the other two theories can broadly explain one of the trends, Cognitive Mobility can explain both. Following this, the conclusion will move to consider what these results say about the current state of British political participation as well as the future trends which this is likely to take. This will equally include how these results speak to the current literature on the topics of voter turnout, other forms of political participation and the relevance and explanatory power of each of the three theories. Finally, as part of this conclusion, the thesis will point to any necessary paths for future research which can build upon, confirm or clarify the results which have been produced in this thesis.

Literature Review:

The first part of this chapter will consist of an outline of the literature concerning voting turnout and the variables which have been shown to have an effect upon it. Following this, the chapter will move to discuss the current literature on non-institutionalised forms of participation such as demonstrations or protests and how they have increased in recent times before considering how changes in the media have affected this and the political sphere. Finally, this chapter will turn to the three theories which will be assessed by this thesis in an attempt to understand the shift of declining voting turnout and the coinciding increase of citizens choosing to engage in other forms of political participation instead. These theories will consist of Social Capital, Cognitive Mobility and General Incentives respectively.

The study of voting turnout has been defined and very much directed by the work of Powell in his award winning book "*Contemporary Democracies*" (1982), which suggested participation as one of the three main indicators of democratic performance, and then furthered by Powell (1986) and Jackman (1987) through their articles published in the *American Political Science Review*, respectively. Powell identified five factors which systematically affect voter turnout with party-group linkages and nationally competitive districts being the dominant variables, after examining mean turnout in 17 democratic countries in the 1970s. It is Jackman's work however which has very much defined the study of voter turnout up to the modern day. He placed an even greater emphasis upon the role of institutions and with great clarity demonstrated that five institutional variables affect turnout: nationally competitive districts, electoral disproportionality, multipartyism, unicameralism and compulsory voting. While inspired by Powell, Jackman chose to omit his contemporary's main variable of party-group linkages as it was shown to have no systematic affect across his study of 19 democratic nations in the 1960s and 1970s.

The other pioneering work in this field has been by Franklin (2004) who confronts the issue of moving variables. He asserted that the logical way to ascertain the impact of a particular variable upon turnout is to examine whether turnout increases or decreases when that variable changes. Thus, the analysis should be dynamic. In order to perform empirical analysis he uses previous turnout as a control variable, in turn making the analysis explicitly dynamic.

Franklin also creates interactive variables between institutional factors and the proportion of the electorate which is new (facing one of its first three elections). This ground-breaking work, although having its shortcomings, has pointed to the direction future research must go by paying closer attention to the dynamics of turnout and explicitly testing whether these variables have an impact on new cohorts. This moves the analysis away from cross-national variations towards internal fluctuations instead, which is where this study will focus.

However, it remains important to understand the variables which impact cross-national variations and then equally whether these in turn match up with the internal fluctuations trends being considered here.

This chapter will now work through Jackman's aforementioned five institutional variables in order to create a clear picture of what has been shown as regards each and from this whether Jackman's work remains as influential to the current day.

First, compulsory voting has been shown to have a very steady and positive impact on voting turnout. Jackman (1987) estimated that it increases turnout by about 13 percentage points and this has then subsequently been confirmed in several studies across the democracies of Western Europe with the magnitude remaining at between 10-15 percentage points (Blais & Carty, 1990; Blais & Dobrzynska, 1998; Franklin, 1996, 2004; Blais & Aarts, 2005). Not only will compulsory voting increase turnout, it will do so almost immediately. Examples of this are relatively easy to come by with Australia having an average turnout of 94.5% in the twenty four elections since 1946 when it introduced compulsory voting, and Belgium seeing

a 92.7% average turnout across the nineteen elections since 1947, when they introduced compulsory voting. In this sense, proponents of compulsory voting put forward the case as this being the best means we have to tackle the twin evils of low turnout and unequal turnout, in the demographic sense, with no significant costs (Lever, 2010). While it can be said that compulsory voting increases turnout it is equally well established there remains certain caveats to this. For example, Norris (2002) suggests that compulsory voting only increases turnout in what she refers to as “older” democracies, speculating that this may concern the way the law is enforced in such nations or that its impact remains conditional on the presence of broader norms about the desirability of obeying the law. Equally, Blais et al. (2003) suggests that compulsory voting will only make a difference where there are actually sanctions for not voting. However, the enforcement of these sanctions is not strictly examined and such a study would again add an extra caveat and depth to the study. There are, however, questions about the morality or principle of compulsory voting. The issues surrounding the case are put forward well by Lever (2010) who discusses the case both for and against the introduction of compulsory voting and concludes that for now while there are difficulties with the case for compulsion this does not mean that compulsory voting cannot serve an important remedial purpose. However, it is emphasized that this does not in turn equate to advocating its adoption by long established, stable and seemingly functional democracies.

The second variable is that of unicameralism which concerns the nature of the state parliament and the interaction between the different houses and the resulting power each holds based on the presence or absence of other houses. For example, the UK is a bicameral legislature with the two houses; the lower House of Commons and the upper chamber in the House of Lords, whereas Norway is a unicameral legislature with the single house, the “Storting”. The logical assumption made here is that with only one chamber the members of this do not have to compete or compromise with another legislative chamber. Where

legislation can only be produced through compromise between members of the two houses it means that elections for the lower house plays a less decisive role in the production of legislation. The stronger the bicameralism is, the more this would apply. As such, unicameralism should foster turnout, however there are mixed results on this. Some have found positive effects on turnout (Jackman, 1987; Fornos et al., 2004; Jackman & Miller, 1995) whereas others have found this to have no effect (Blais & Carty, 1990; Black, 1991; Radcliff & Davies, 2000; Perez-Linan, 2001). The findings on this prove less conclusive therefore than some of Jackman's other variables.

Interrelated to this is Jackman's third variable of multipartyism which equally impacts how decisive elections are in government formation and then in turn how decisive that government is. This variable has been very much directed by the work of Downs (1957) who argued that voters in a multiparty system actually have little say in the selection of the government. Coalitions are likely to be formed and it is not possible to claim that any one voter opted for such a combination of parties or policies. As such the electorate does not directly select the government that will govern them and while the type of political system which seems to offer the voter a more definite choice among policies will in fact ultimately offer them a less definitive one. As such, elections are less important in the formation of the government and given this, citizens have less incentive to vote and thus multipartyism will therefore likely depress turnout. This negative correlation, between number of parties and turnout, has been shown in a variety of studies (Jackman, 1987; Blais & Carty, 1990; Jackman & Miller, 1995; Blais & Dobryznska, 1998; Radcliff & Davis, 2000; Kostadinova, 2003), however despite Downs (1957) work there remains relatively little understanding of why this is the case. A greater choice of parties should result in more views being represented and therefore more of the electorate should be able to align more closely to a party and therefore incentivise voting.

The fourth variable is nationally competitive districts which proved a key variable in both Powell (1986) and Jackman's (1987) findings. The logic is clear; when an election in a country, state or local area is viewed as competitive or close, both the electorate and the parties have an incentive to mobilise support as each vote is seen as more powerful. This finding was shown comprehensively by Gosnell (1930) in his analysis of turnout in Europe. In this, data from the 1924 British General Election showed that turnout was considerably higher in those constituencies where the margin of victory was close. Powell's (1986) results complement this finding well in terms of nationally competitive districts appearing important to turnout.

Electoral disproportionality is the final of the five variables Jackman identified. The central thought of this is that in large modern democracies, such as Britain or the US, one individual vote is extremely unlikely to be decisive in shaping the overall outcome of the election. Having said this, it is equally true that some electoral systems will increase or decrease the potential decisiveness of the marginal vote. In large districts, parties have an incentive to mobilise everywhere whereas in a representative system some single member districts may well be written off as either hopeless or alternatively as almost guaranteed victories such as under the First Past the Post system in Britain. Here therefore, it is suggested that turnout will be higher in a Proportional Representation (PR) system where each individual vote cast will be reflected exactly in the overall outcome. Studies of advanced democracies (Blais & Carty, 1990; Jackman & Miller, 1995; Franklin, 1996; Radcliff & Davis, 2000) as well as in post-communist countries (Kostadinova, 2003) have confirmed that turnout tends to be higher in a PR system and/or larger districts. Having said this, some of the most recent research suggests that electoral systems may not impact turnout as much as we originally believed or in the way in which we thought. For example, Vowles (2010) considers the case of New Zealand and its change from a Single Member Plurality System (SMP) to a Mixed Member Proportional

(MMP) system in 1996. Here, despite both theory and cross sectional empirical evidence indicating that turnout should be higher following the change to MMP, turnout actually declined.

Beyond these variables there is then a wide ranging literature on other institutional variables with age and vote-facilitating rules standing out among these. Age offers more of a conclusive finding with the fact that propensity to vote increases with age being a well-established fact (Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980; Blais, 2000). Following this it is then logical to conclude that if the voting age is lowered, expected turnout will fall (Blais & Dobrzynska, 1998; Franklin 2004). Despite the well established nature of this fact, there is less agreement on why this is the case and whether it is concerned with a generational or life-cycle effect with much debate between the two. Potentially the only unanimously agreed upon point within the field is that of the difficulty in disentangling the complex mixture of these two effects. Parry et al. offer rather tentative support to the life cycle effect in relation to conventional politics in the form of voting (1992, 170), while at the same time equally identifying signs of a “generational imprint” (1992, 160) in relation to less traditional forms of politics in the form of protest. Jowell and Park (1998, 14) present one of the more solid views on the issue by concluding that “the trend towards less engagement in politics among the young...appears to signal a generational change rather than just an effect of the life cycle at work”. Previously, Heath and Park (1997) had provided more tentative support for life cycle factors, but cautiously prefaced their findings with the caveat that generational and life cycle effects can never be definitely disentangled from one another. Evidence from the key studies of the 1990s clearly fail to offer conclusive support for either of the two theoretical conceptualisations and instead it has tended to lend support to Parry et al.’s (1992, 155) conclusion that: “all in all..it seems impossible to rule out either process”.

The findings on vote-facilitating rules are however somewhat more diverse and varied. It appears logical to assume that the easier it is for an individual to vote the more likely they will be to do so, as was confirmed by Gimpel & Schucknecht (2003) and then backed up by evidence that the ability to use a postal vote increases turnout (Southwell, 2004; Rallings & Thrasher, 2006). Along similar lines, Blais et al. (2003) showed that the availability of postal, advanced and proxy voting all have a positive association with turnout. However, there is much less known about the impact of specific rules with Norris (2002) examining the effect of variables such as the number of polling days, polling on a rest day, special polling booths and transfer voting and finding no significant effect of these. Overall in terms of specific rules, the only possible conclusion to draw is that we know very little about what effect each has on electoral turnout both individually or combined. With the spread of democracy however it will slowly become possible to analyse the effect of each variable across a broad spectrum of countries and systems, therefore making it possible to draw more conclusive results.

Overall, while it has been shown that each of these variables can have an impact on electoral turnout we still know rather little about the specifics of each. This is partly because, as Franklin (2004) suggests, the effect of institutional characteristics may possibly vary across types of voter. Despite this, the dominant view in the field, and that forwarded by Franklin, is that the degree of electoral competition is the most crucial determinant of turnout. However, Blais (2006) and the position this thesis will take is very sceptical of this. While turnout is almost certainly affected by the closeness of an election, this remains only a weak relationship. There is little evidence to suggest that elections are becoming systematically less competitive over time meaning that the dominant view currently struggles to explain the recent general downward trend of electoral turnout and therefore this trend needs to be explained by other means.

Having discussed the most traditional form of political engagement in voting and the factors which affect it, this chapter will now turn to other forms of political participation which as a field has received growing attention in recent times. Over 30 years ago, the authors of Political Action (Barnes et al., 1979) predicted the growth and spread of what they termed “unconventional political participation” across advanced industrial societies and did so partly due to what was referred to as a deep-rooted intergenerational change. This was, that petitions, boycotts and other forms of direct action would no longer be considered unconventional but more or less become normal actions for many. This prediction served to confirm that of Inglehart (1977;5, 317-321) whom predicted declining rates of elite-directed political mobilization and a coinciding rising rate of elite-challenging political behaviour among Western publics. In other words, lower rates of voting turnout matched by a greater propensity to demonstrate or engage in other forms of direct action (Inglehart & Catterberg, 2002). Using the 1974 Political Action Survey Inglehart and Catterberg show a significant increase in the net shift of people who had engaged in a demonstration or signed a petition, across countries including Britain, the US, Austria, Italy and Switzerland. It is clear from these findings that the predictions of Barnes et al. have been systematically proven correct across a wide spectrum of countries and individuals.

These findings have been further confirmed by various studies where what is now known as “institutionalised forms of participation” such as voting and party membership are very much on the decline in most liberal democracies with this being matched by a rise in more innovative forms of civic engagement (Dalton, 2008; Klingemann & Fuchs, 1995; Norris, 2002; Pattie et al., 2004). As such, this clear increase in non-institutionalised forms of participation was described as “the most unambiguous finding” in the study of the changing relationship between citizens and the state by Klingmann and Fuchs (1995, p.431). In this sense participatory acts such political consumerism, demonstrations and internet activism

have all become important channels of the public voice and participation in contemporary democracies (Norris, 2001; Norris et al., 2005; Stolle et al., 2005). There is obviously then a consideration as to why individuals may now prefer to engage in these non-institutionalised forms of engagement. Some authors have suggested that it is concerning how they are more easily compatible with the demands and lifestyles of a new generation of citizens who have been characterised as “monitorial”, “post-materialist” and “critical” (Inglehart, 1997; Norris, 1999; Schudson, 1999). These three terms will subsequently be discussed specifically as regards Cognitive Mobility Theory. However there remains a lack of any solid conclusion as to whether this is the case with some authors asserting that non-institutional forms of political participation do in fact require less commitment with participation of this kind often sporadic and opting out rather easy (Li & Marsh, 2008; Trechsel, 2007). Yet others have claimed that events such as taking part in a demonstration, as an example, can be just as demanding as more institutionalised forms of participation (Norris et al., 2005). The plethora of non-institutionalised forms of participation available to the electorate make it difficult to compare these as though they were one, making analysis in this sense inconclusive.

Research on youth participation in politics and the nature this takes offers somewhat more conclusive findings. Early studies considering declining youth electoral turnout would define this generation as politically unengaged, disinterested in the political system and having comparatively lower levels of political knowledge compared to their older counterparts (Kimberlee, 2002; Wattenburg, 2002; Henn et al. 2005; Park, 2004; Pattie et al. 2004) however, this view has shifted quite dramatically and arguably sets the way for future research which can be applied more broadly to the electorate. More recent studies have led to the conclusion that instead of being unengaged young people are actually just engaging in a different way through different forms of political action (Quintelier, 2007). This is likely to come in the form of what Norris (2003) referred to as “cause-orientated” styles of politics or

what was termed “micro-politics” by Pattie et al. (2004), rather than formal politics as we traditionally know it through the ballot box. Henn et al. (1999, 2002, p. 168) offer a concise summation of this issue by critically stating that the traditional understanding of youth participation has been “tied far too narrowly to the domain of elections and parliamentary activity”, given they show young people to generally have a wide ranging political interest. Marsh et al. (2007) also critique the stance generally taken in the literature as well, on the basis that we are merely measuring what is easy, in electoral turnout, and that this is too narrow a conception of political participation. Having said this, there has undoubtedly been a recognition of this among academics which has therefore led to a qualitative shift in political participation (eg Norris, 2002, 2003, 2005; Pattie et al., 2004; Russell et al., 2002, 2007; Marsh et al., 2007) and that this is most evident in young peoples’ politics (Dalton, 2008).

From these findings it is clear that there has been, and continues to be, a shift away from the view that equating political apathy to non-participation in conventional politics was a massive oversimplification of the equation (Bhavnani, 1994). Instead what is now taken as more important is the level of “diffuse support” for the political system, where there is a broad support for democracy and elections (Marsh, 1990; Easton, 1975) and as such this thesis will attempt to understand the causes of these recent trends.

An important side note here is an interesting branch of this growing field concerning how the spread of non-institutionalised participation has the potential to increase or reduce the inequalities present within more institutional forms of participation. As mentioned above, there are certain demographic factors which prove extremely good predictors of voter turnout including age, gender and education. This is extremely relevant to the ideals of equality and democracy, with the legitimacy of a democratic political system depending partly upon the extent to which all citizens who will be affected by the decisions made by the political system having the opportunity to have their voices heard in the decision making process (Young,

2000). While democracy may be a contested concept in the modern day as to what exactly it should entail, in its broadest sense from its Greek roots it means “Rule by the (simple) people”. It is therefore of great importance to determine whether these forms of participation which have been discussed contribute to achieving this ideal of a more inclusive political community. For example several authors have claimed that non-institutional forms of participation are important to mobilise younger citizens (Norris, 2002; Zukin et al., 2006) and increase engagement in this way. Equally, it has been suggested that certain forms of politics are more attractive to women as they take place outside of political institutions and therefore are not dominated by men (Eliasoph, 1998) or on a similar note that such alternative activities are easier for women to combine with family care (Burns et al., 2001, pp 307-33).

So far, it is clear that electoral turnout is on the decline, generally across the world and that we can identify some factors which will invariably impact this, although this analysis only goes so far and there remains little conclusive evidence as to why cross-national variance in electoral turnout persists and why there has been this general downward trend as well as fluctuations between them. It is then equally apparent that there has been an emergence of other forms of political participation in the shape of demonstrations, protests and boycotts. What remains equally unclear is as to why this shift has taken place, if it will persist and then in turn if it poses an issue to the democratic ideal which many hold dear. The theories of Social Capital, Cognitive Mobility and General Incentives will be assessed in an attempt to understand these. However, first it is necessary to address the media as one of the largest fundamental changes in society over recent decades which has infiltrated all areas of life and has been very influential in the changes observed in political engagement.

As the media and internet has grown over the last 30 years so has the body of literature on, its impact upon politics and then in turn how this is effecting engagement in the political sphere, in a world where “media are now used anyhow, anyplace, anytime” (Livingstone, 2004a, 76).

Before discussing this, it is important to note a criticism of parts of this literature, on the grounds that it fails to consider distinct patterns of people's media usage, choosing instead to merely focus on the volume (Shah et al., 2005). Even if some of the analysis must be carefully considered and critiqued in the sense of how it has been undertaken it remains an incredibly important branch of research. It has been demonstrated that news media consumption and interpersonal political discussion play a crucial role in civic participation (McLeod et al., 1996; Shah, McLeod & Yoon, 2001) meaning that changes over recent times in the media will therefore undoubtedly have seen an impact on latter. While these results may be broader in terms of civic participation within society, part of this will concern voter turnout and could help explain the downward trend of participation in electoral politics. The media has equally undoubtedly impacted the way in which politicians engage with the electorate with the new media presence and influence placing a burden and constraint upon political actors who must develop skills in appearing "just like you" and seeming to address "everyone as someone" (Coleman & Moss, 2008; Scannell, 2000).

First, it is difficult to contradict the thought that the internet and growing media presence in our everyday lives has expanded, as well as substantially complicated, the relationship between the media and civic participation and with it the logic of collective action (Davis, 1999; Galston, 2000). This is partly concerned with how the internet offers both a source of political information as well as a platform for political expression (Dahlgren, 2000; White, 1997). The debate within the literature has therefore focused largely upon exactly what this effect has been and whether we can categorise this as positive or negative. However, this is not a new field as political scientists and sociologists have long debated how information and experience intersect to produce civic engagement (Almond & Verba, 1963, 1980; Coleman, 1990; Habermas, 1979; Inglehart, 1997; Taylor, 1989; Tonnies, 1940) considerably before the internet and mass media were present as they are today.

The main criticism of the effect of the internet and increased media and technology usage is that it has slowly eroded our personal relationships, where we now spend time watching the TV, on a computer or other such lone activities, rather than socialising with friends, relatives or colleagues. This is exactly what Nie (2001) concludes, with increased time spent online decreasing our time spent at events or socialising as we may have done beforehand. In this respect he suggests that the internet has caused and is causing individuals to lose touch with their social environment. However, such criticisms of the internet and media usage have all, as mentioned, largely been critiqued on the fact that they focus upon volume of usage rather than how an individual is using it and engaging with it. Other criticisms of the literature work along relatively similar lines with suggestions that the mass media is hampered by the problem of information overload (Livingstone 2004b; Couldry & Langer, 2005) and then secondly that this presents an issue of which sources to trust (Ulsaner, 2004; Welch, Hinnant & Moon 2005; Dutton & Shepherd, 2006).

Once we begin to consider how we are engaging with the internet and mass media, much of the literature has been positive as regards their impact on our civic engagement and political participation. This can be split quite comfortably into two distinct sections however, with one focusing upon the informational side and our increased ability to consume it whereas the other focuses on the benefits in terms of communication and the potential held here. Even from the earliest days of TV, the effects of televised election coverage clearly showed that through exposure to political broadcasts, voters acquired significant information about campaign issues and policy proposals (Trenaman & McQuail, 1961; Blumer & McQuail, 1968). Beginning with these informational motives which have gained a large amount of scholarly attention as regards civic engagement as they are shown to indirectly promote increased political knowledge (Eveland, Shah & Kwak 2003) and awareness of civic opportunities and objectives. The dominant view of this literature is that informational usage

of the mass media does have pro-civic consequences. Voters who go online to seek information, interact with campaigns and share their views with other citizens are likely to feel better informed, more politically efficacious and more willing to engage in the democratic process (Shah, Kwak & Holbert, 2001; Johnson & Kaye, 2003; Kenski & Stroud, 2006; Xenos & Moy, 2007; Shah et al., 2007). This usage however may range from Norris (1996) and her claim that televised news and public affairs programming is beneficial to the health of a democratic society, through to that of McLeod et al. (1996, 1999) who demonstrate that newspaper reading and local news viewing are correlated to civic participation at a community level, as individuals can use the information they have gained to reflect and deliberate about issues. This thought then obviously stretches to the internet which can encourage community involvement and foster civic participation (Norris 1998; Shah, McLeod et al. 2001) doing so partly based on its inherently flexible nature which allows us access to an incredibly wide range of sources, viewpoints and stories where it is possible to tailor content to our own interests as well as delve much further into issues of importance (Davis 1999; Jones 1995; Rheingold 1993).

Second is the communicational benefits where research suggests that communication among citizens largely mediates the effects of news consumption on civic engagement (McLeod et al. 2001; Sotirovic & McLeod 2001) with the effects of the media on participation being strong while largely indirect. This links in more so with the former point where informational usage of the mass media and the internet will influence participation through its impact on discussion and reflection with friends, relatives and colleagues. This is quite a separate point from that of using the internet as a platform for communication. The potential to communicate via the internet is simply vast with it now possible to share ideas, thoughts or concerns of a political nature through mediums such as e-mail, instant messaging or online chats (Price & Cappella, 2002). Lupia and Sin (2003, p.316) summarise this well stating that

individuals are now in a position to “post, at a minimal cost, messages and images that can be viewed instantly by global audiences”. As such, this creates a whole new perspective to the potential of collective action with it now possible for citizens to coordinate actions to address joint concerns in a way that was not so before (Bimber, 1998; Davis, 1999; Norris, 1998). In a similar sense, it may equally allow citizens to encounter opportunities for civic engagement as well as organising community activities (Corrado & Firestone, 1996; Pavlik, 1996).

Having discussed the impact of the internet and mass media it is now necessary to consider the various theories as to how it is possible to link these two fields of literature and explain how the changing world and environment in which we now live has impacted voting turnout as well as political participation more broadly. As previously mentioned this will consist of Social Capital, Cognitive Mobility and finally General Incentives.

First, the theory of “Social Capital”, which while remaining a contested concept with various approaches as to how it is defined and measured (Coleman, 1988; Halpren, 1999; Hall, 1999; Putnam, 2000), has been forwarded most predominantly by Putnam (1993, 1995a, 2000). It has been used to explain a breakdown in society with focus on citizen’s individual level of social and civic engagement (Brehm & Relm, 1997; Shah, 1998; Usllaner, 1998; Newton, 1999a; Foley & Edwards, 1996). In his seminal book “*Bowling Alone*” Putnam uses the simple analogy of whereas people would previously bowl in local leagues they now choose to do so alone, to represent the wider trends in society of individualistic tendencies. He states “Social Capital refers to features of social organisation, such as trust, norms and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating co-ordinated actions”. In his work, he focuses upon the US stating that they previously had an enviable society which has, over the last two or three decades, shrunk to the point where they have become increasingly disconnected from their family, friends and neighbours as well as our democratic structures. Putnam shows that the US is now a society where people sign fewer petitions, know their

neighbours less, belong to fewer organisations and meet friends less frequently. They are generally a lot less engaged in society and civic life. In terms of explaining why this is the case Putnam is surprisingly precise in his estimations of the causes. He observes that this decline in civic society, in his study between 1973 and 1994, coincided with the breakdown of the traditional family unit with greater rates of divorce, single parent families and fewer marriages. However, he concludes that this actually had little impact overall. Instead, he attributes roughly 10 percent of this decline to time and/or money pressures, a further 10 percent to suburbanisation and approximately 25 percent to TV and electronic entertainment developments. The largest and most important however is that of slow and steady generational change to which he states contributes 50 percent.

While Putnam offers seemingly conclusive evidence that there has been a decline in Social Capital in the US which can be used to explain a variety of civic trends, it is equally apparent that these results may well not be directly transferable to Britain. This is the argument forwarded by Hall (1999) where he finds no equivalent erosion of Social Capital to that seen in the US and suggests that this fact can be ascribed to educational reform, the transformation of the class structure and government policy. There has been a massive expansion of both secondary and post-secondary education which increases the propensity of an individual to become involved in community affairs. Alongside this has been the huge changes in the class structure of Britain with a growth of the middle classes who remain much more likely to have organisational affiliations and are generally more involved within society. The final reason Hall gives for Britain's lack of decline in Social Capital is government policy; while this remains very difficult to quantify there have undoubtedly been great efforts made to cultivate the voluntary sector with many social provisions maintaining this. This stance has equally been forwarded by Pattie et al. (2004) who, in their book, "*Citizenship in Britain*", claim that

the relationship between Social Capital and both election turnout and civic attitudes is significant.

With Social Capital remaining high in Britain it would be expected that political engagement would equally remain high, however Hall suggests that feelings of political efficacy and political trust had reached relatively low levels in Britain by the 1990s. There are problems here with measurement though as there is a suggestion that these levels have always been low and therefore remained steady as well as having problems with uneven distribution given the middle class phenomena. Given this and the findings of Henn, Weinstein and Hodgkinson (2007), that social capital has at best a mixed impact on political attitudes and is certainly no more significant than socio-economic differences a much more inconclusive picture of Social Capital, and its effect on political participation, begins to form within the literature.

Clarke et al. (2004) tested six different models of turnout including that of Social Capital, using the 2001 British Election Study (BES) and found that while no single model could fully explain turnout in Britain, the General Incentives Model and the Cognitive Mobilisation Model dominated the others. As such, this thesis will consider these in more detail.

Cognitive Mobility potentially provides a much better explanation of the phenomena we have seen in terms of political participation and engagement in Britain. Ronald Inglehart first coined the term “Cognitive Mobility” in 1970 in order to refer to “the increasingly wide distribution of the political skills necessary to cope with an extensive political community” (1970: 47). However, his original use and purpose of the term was to explain support for European integration which was growing in prominence at the time. It was Dalton who then chose to utilise this theory in order to explain declining rates of party identification in advanced democracies through the notion of an increasingly well-educated electorate. Dalton’s works have included the compilation of an impressive collection of data

documenting this erosion of relatively stable party attachments in a large number of democracies, and thus, he has been very influential through his interpretations of this dealignment phenomenon (Dalton et al., 1984; Dalton & Wattenburg, 2000).

Dalton (1984; 2007) argues that mass-level characteristics have changed to such a degree that voters now approach elections in a much more precarious manner than they did so previously. The argument is an extension of the foundations set by Shively's (1979) Michigan Model, where party identification serves a functional role in helping citizens who possess only a low level of political information to make decisions about how to vote, with Borre and Katz (1973:79-85) equally discussing, quite directly, the functional value of partisanship as a political guide. To become more politically informed bears costs and these costs are taken to be higher for those who are poorly educated and receive little exposure to information about current events. Following this, and using the model, it would be expected that as the public evolves to become better educated and the mass media becomes more prevalent, then partisanship would be expected to decline. Dalton (2007:276) summarises this thought "Cognitive Mobilization involves two separate developments. First, the public's ability to process political information has increased, as a function of higher levels of education and political sophistication among the electorate. Second, the cost of acquiring political information has decreased, such as through the expansion of the mass media and other sources. Cognitive Mobilization thus means that more citizens now possess the political resources and skills that better prepare them to deal with the complexities of politics and reach their own political decisions without reliance on affective, habitual party cues or other external cues".

While Dalton may have focused upon the US and the trends experienced there, similar results are applicable across other Western democracies. Research on political attitudes in Western Europe offers a very similar picture of a more informed and better educated electorate whose

level of political interest is rising and political concerns extending to an ever growing range of issues (Flickinger & Studlar, 1992). For example, research has demonstrated a slow and steady erosion in German's attachments to political parties (Wessels, 2009; Arzheimer, 2006) with this in turn leading to expectations that issues and candidates will play a greater role in electoral choice (eg Rohrschneider, Schmitt- Beck & Jung, 2012). Such trends are then replicated across many advanced industrial democracies (Clarke & Stewart, 1998; Dalton, 2000; Thomassen, 2005; McAllister, 2011, chp.3). We now live in a world where people no longer require partisan alignment in order to make a political decision as was previously suggested by the likes of Shivley (1979) and Borre & Katz (1973) with sophisticated voters relying far less on party attachments in order to vote (Sniderman, Brody & Tetlock, 1991). Additionally, this change in type and ability of political participant allows for engagement in more demanding forms of participation rather than merely the traditional form of the ballot box. This thought has been replicated by Inglehart & Catterberg (2002) who claim that younger cohorts now have a greater level of political skills than their older counterparts, concluding that the processes of value change and cognitive mobilisation tend to go hand in hand. People are placing greater value on self expression and their rising levels of skills enable them to participate in politics at a higher level where they will increasingly look to shape specific policy decisions rather than entrusting these to more skilled minorities (Inglehart, 1977). As such the politically-sophisticated voter of today is therefore probably far more in line with Schumpeter's (1950) ideal citizen than the typically uninformed and uninterested American voter as identified by Berelson et al. (1964) and Campbell et al. (1960).

Cognitive Mobility has had a huge influence on the literature more broadly as well however and has appeared either as a primary explanatory variable or a control in a wide variety of contexts. For example, Fuchs and Klingemann (1995) included the increasing cognitive skills

of citizens when explaining the changing relationship between citizens and political institutions. Pharr & Putnam (2000) equally suggest a model in which a well-informed public is a pre-cursor to a more critical electorate and other scholars investigating alternative explanations for dealignment have then felt it necessary to control for Cognitive Mobility (Arzheimer, 2006; Huber et al., 2005) as have academics researching the sources of support for the European Union (Gabel, 1998).

As previously alluded to, education, one way to increase Cognitive Mobility, is one of the most commonly cited explanations of electoral participation. The greater an individual's level of education, the more likely they are to chose to engage electorally. This equally works on a national level where countries with a greater education system tend to have higher voting turnout. It is suggested that education may instil a sense of civic duty by fostering democratic values and beliefs (Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980) as well as providing individuals with the necessary skills to deal with the bureaucracy of voting (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993). While there has been shown to be a very strong relationship between education and voting turnout in the US, there has been far more mixed results in the UK case with several studies finding a low correlation between the two (Dalton, 2002; Wattenburg, 2002; Larcinese, 2002) whereas others have found education does in fact have an impact upon turnout in Britain (Pattie & Johnston, 2001). The consensus remains that this is a weak relationship however and these results are confirmed by Denny and Doyle (2008) who find that while education may play a small role in determining voter turnout, both cognitive ability and personality play a far greater role. As such, they suggest that educational reforms designed to improve cognitive ability, rather than general educational attainment, would have a knock-on effect of improving democratic participation. However, it has been shown that both education and the media contribute to raising individuals' levels of both information and conceptualisation (Converse, 1964; Campbell et al., 1996; Luskin, 1987; Smith, 1989).

The Cognitive Mobility Model fits with and can potentially compliment the theory of General Incentives or more broadly Rational Choice Theory which posits that electoral participation will be influenced and determined by both the costs, as regards processing information and forming decisions as well the opportunity cost of going to the polls, and secondly, the benefits of voting, which are derived from fulfilling civic duty and the policy benefits from the election outcome (Jennings & Niemi, 1981). However, these are two distinct theories with the latter largely rooted in economics but holding applicability to the political sphere. There has been an ongoing debate as to the applicability of the theory, with some advocates of Rational Choice models of participation (Tsebelis, 1990; Aldrich, 1993; Jackman, 1993) as well as those who deny that such models have any explanatory purpose in political action (Hindess, 1988; Lowi, 1992; Eckstein, 1992). Further to this, there is a group of academics who believe that such models are useful, while only giving a partial account of political participation (Elster, 1983, 1989; Mansbridge, 1990). Here the literature surrounding Rational Choice Theory will be discussed before progressing to consider the specific literature regarding General Incentives.

Downs (1957) puts forward that a situation arises where it is irrational for many people to vote, on the basis that in any given election, the chance that their one individual vote will be decisive is, while not zero, very small indeed. In terms of the cost-benefit model, the marginal return on information acquired for voting purposes is measured solely by the expected gain from voting “correctly” rather than “incorrectly”. However, this would assume that the agent’s vote can be decisive, which has just been shown to be extremely unlikely. The outcome of the election depends insignificantly on which way an individual agent votes and therefore voting “correctly” produces no gain in utility whatsoever and he may as well have voted “incorrectly” and achieved the same outcome.

Rational Choice Theory has however been critiqued on the basis that it makes very strong and potentially unrealistic assumptions about voters' cognitive capabilities as well as their decision making abilities (eg Conlisk, 1996; Green & Shapiro, 1996). A second critique concerns the fact that much of the research on the model has focused upon voting turnout as the central form of political participation, which as Aldrich (1993) asserts is a relatively weak area for testing such models as voting is such a low cost activity, particularly when compared to the likes of long term protests.

Much of the literature then turns to consider which variables and factors impact the costs and benefits of voting in an election. For example, many have looked at this from the perspective of partisanship and party alignment. This is understood as Dalton (1992:69) expressed, stating that partisanship is "understood as a psychological bond between voters and political parties". In this sense a rational voter with a strong partisan attachment may still choose to vote on the calculation that it is worthwhile to maximise their party's support (Dunleavy, 1991). Empirical findings have confirmed this relationship where individuals with a strong attachment to a party are more likely to vote, other things being equal, than individuals with weaker or no partisan attachments (Crewe et al., 1977; Sabucedo & Cramer, 1991; Franklin, 1996). Supporting a political party in this sense, increases the perceived benefits of casting a ballot and therefore impacts the outcome of the mental trade of between cost-benefit in voting analysis. From this, as partisan alignment has shown to be on the decline both in Britain, despite a recent surge in party membership, and across the world, it would be expected that the former equation would apply to an increasing number of people, more would see it as irrational to vote and turnout would fall. However, it is important to note that the effectiveness of this particular model is more dependent on the type of political system. For example, Blais et al. (2000) show that rational considerations play a larger role under FPTP, such as in Britain, compared to normative ones being more powerful under a PR system.

Overall, one of the most influential and engaging works on Rational Choice Theory is that of Blais (2000) in his book *“To Vote or Not to Vote: The Merits and Limits of Rational Choice Theory”*. In this Blais puts forward both sides of the discussion as regards Rational Choice Theory however concludes that while the theory should be considered an important tool – even when it doesn’t work – its empirical contribution as to why people vote is quite limited.

Given these critiques of the Rational Choice Model, the General Incentives Model (Whitely et al. 1994; Whitely & Seyd, 2002) looks to build upon this and to correct the paradox of participation that is potentially created and it was this model, rather than that of Rational Choice, which Clarke et al. (2004) found to possess greater explanatory value in the case of explaining electoral turnout in Britain. Whitely et al. (1994) explain the decline in party membership throughout Britain, however the findings can be applied to participation more broadly where incentive based models of participation are found to work better than structural based models. It is equally noted here that structural explanations of these downward trends of participation emphasize the importance of societal trends which are generally beyond the control of parties but which reduce the number of people joining or being politically active. There is more encouragement offered by choice based explanations which focus upon the importance of various types of incentives which can promote both membership of a party but equally political activism more broadly. In this case, the parties themselves can have an influence on participation by making such participation more attractive through incentives. This will be of importance later in the thesis following the results of the three theories and then from these what possible solutions are available to reverse these trends, should this be seen to be necessary.

As regards the specific incentives that comprise the General Incentives Model, these will subsequently be discussed in greater detail, however as mentioned previously, it is well known that many different incentives for voting have been proposed, including those that are

material, social and moral such as forwarded by Olson (1965) as well as those which are instrumental, expressive and normative such as those posited by Butler and Stokes (1969: 24-5).

Overall, it is clear that while there is a substantial body of research on voter turnout, the variables which affect this as well as a growing branch on the different ways the electorate may choose to engage in politics, that we actually know relatively little in terms of understanding the causes of this evolution in political engagement. As such, this thesis will attempt to explain the causes of both the downward trend in voting as well as the increase in alternative forms of political participation.

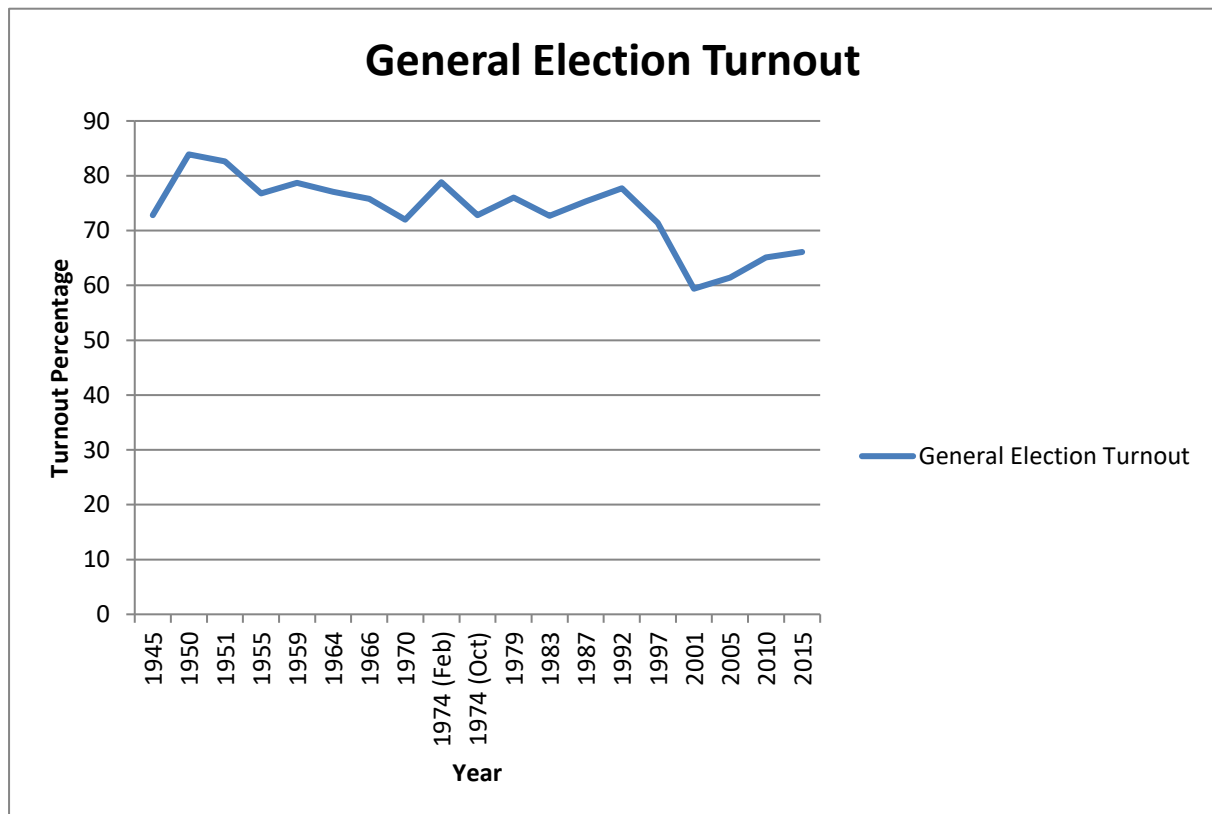
Theory:

The three theories which will form the basis of this thesis in an attempt to explain the trends currently observed in British politics will be outlined in detail throughout this chapter. There will first be a detailed discussion of each theory before turning to outline the hypotheses that develop from these, which will ultimately be tested in the respective theory chapters.

Trends in Political Participation:

Before discussing the actual theories however, it is first important to show the two current trends in British political participation. First is the trend of declining electoral turnout and from Chart 1 it is clear that despite fluctuations, there is a downward trend in the turnout at General Elections in Britain. From a peak of 83.9% in 1950 where turnout would invariably sit comfortably above 70%, it is now the case that turnout has not surpassed 70% for over 15 years, with the lowest turnout appearing in the 2001 General Election at 59.6%. Despite a small resurgence after this, turnout still remains well below what would have been expected in the decades previous to this.

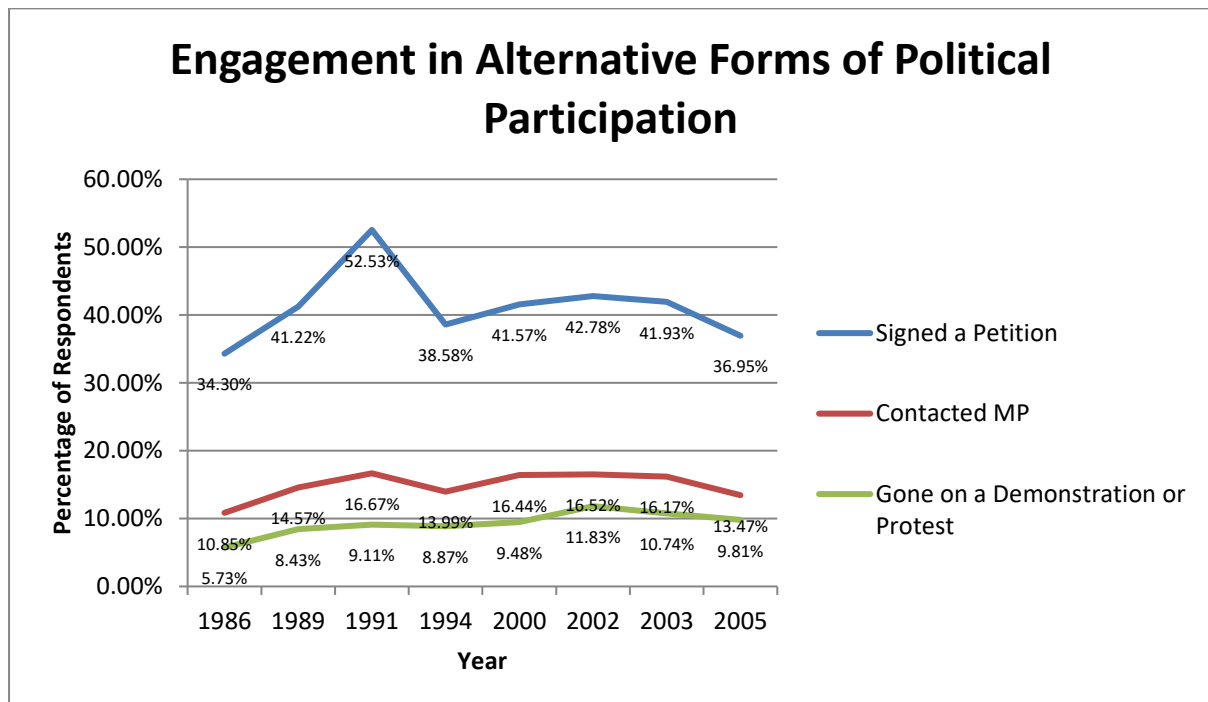
Chart 1



Source: *www.ukpolitical.info* and *www.yppuk.org*

Second, is the opposite trend in participation of an increase in alternative forms of engagement. This chart, taken from a Democratic Audit UK report but using the same British Social Attitudes (BSA) Survey data as this thesis, shows that participation within the given forms of politics has increased across the board, even if again there have been some fluctuations within this. First, those who said they had signed a petition increased only a few percentage points, however sat above this at around 40% for much of the time between 1986 and 2005. The results for those who said they had chosen to contact their local MP regarding an issue had increased by over 50% in the given period, rising from 10.85% through to over 16%. A similar story was equally observable as regards those who had attended either a demonstration or a protest. In this case, participation has jumped from around 5% to almost 10% of respondents.

Chart 2



Source: *BSA*

Theories:

Social Capital:

The first theory is Social Capital which as discussed has been forwarded most predominantly by Robert Putnam and focuses upon the relationships people develop within society and norms within it. He uses the theory of Social Capital primarily to explain the state of US society; where once enviable, has now declined significantly and has thus become unrecognisable. In his groundbreaking work, Putnam considered the way Americans play ten-pin bowling, a sport with a big following in the US, and found that although bowling had never been bigger, Americans are no longer bowling against each other in local leagues. Instead they are literally “Bowling Alone”, hence the title of his seminal work. Despite some suggestions, mainly by Hall (1999), that similar trends of decline are not necessarily

observable in Britain, the theory remains useful as a measure of civic society and has the potential to explain the trends that have been observed in Britain. It would be unwise to refer to this theory as new however, or equally to state Putnam as its founder, even if the exact terminology may be considered so, as well as a greater focus now applied to new technologies by the theory's supporters. Similar ideas of a relationship between pluralistic associational life and American democracy began much before Putnam including James Madison in his work in "The Federalist" and Alexis de Tocqueville in "Democracy in America". It is important to clarify at this point that, as alluded to, there is no clear and undisputed definition for the term "Social Capital" with there even a debate surrounding whether it can be considered a form of capital at all, as economists arguing that capital involves making some form of sacrifice in the present. Social Capital does not see such a sacrifice, rather only benefits in both the present and future. This lack of conclusive definition stems largely from the different focuses of either substance, the sources or the effects of Social Capital (Alder & Kwon, 2002; Field et al., 2000; Robinson et al. 2002; Grootaert, 2002b). This thesis works along the broad ideas of John Field (2003:1-2), who states that the central thesis of Social Capital theory is that "relationships matter", where "social networks are a valuable asset". Brehm and Rahm (1997) and Fukuyama (1995) summarise this definition well and hence this will form the basis of the analysis and how Social Capital shall be conceived throughout this thesis. First Brehm and Rahm describe Social Capital as 'the web of cooperative relationships between citizens that facilitate resolution of collective action problems' (Brehm & Rahn, 1997, p. 999) and then second Fukuyama describes the concept as 'the ability of people to work together for common purposes in groups and organizations' (Fukuyama, 1995, p. 10) and 'Social capital can be defined simply as the existence of a certain set of informal values or norms shared among members of a group that permit cooperation among them' (Fukuyama, 1995).

Using these definitions, Social Capital theory refers to resources including trust, norms and networks of association which can facilitate collective action. Putnam states that there has been an undeniable decline in the previously prevailing sense of civic duty which encouraged people to vote and participate through the traditional means of the ballot box and as such there has been a noticeable decline in Social Capital within American society. This sense of community and playing your role within it has declined to the point where society is almost unrecognisable with voting turnout forming only one element of this. As such, Putnam's conception of Social Capital would equally include other measures of community activity and engagement such as volunteering, joining or participating in local sports clubs, community organisations or groups. Putnam believes that this decline in civic duty and with it the sense of community and playing your role within it includes both the traditional means of participation in voting as well as other forms such as signing petitions. He predicts that a decline of Social Capital will in turn lead to a very general decline across all forms of civic activity. Klasse (1999) supports this claim in that all nine western European countries he analysed between 1981 and 1996 showed a strong positive correlation between generalised trust and unconventional political behaviour. With this, high levels of interpersonal trust seemingly contribute to greater participation in protest politics. Pattie et al. (2004) equally state that there is a significant relationship between Social Capital and voting turnout as well as general civic attitudes. Putnam will therefore form the first hypothesis which shall be tested as regards Social Capital; as Social Capital falls it causes a decline in political participation both as regards voting as well as other forms of engagement such as joining a protest group or signing a petition concerning a local, national or international issue.

It is important to note here however that there have been serious theoretical criticisms of Putnam's work, notably from Levi (1996) who claims that he fails to adequately explain the mechanism by which Social Capital leads to civic engagement. Levi states of civic

associations formed by trust that, “this may be a description of what is, but it is not a theory that identifies the mechanisms of production, maintenance, and growth of Social Capital” (1996, p.46). Additionally, she states it is not evident that the norms of reciprocity created in associations carry over to the political community at large. Hence, in Levi’s view, Putnam requires a more specific definition of trust, in order for Social Capital to have a proper theoretical basis.

However, these concerns are rebuked by the likes of Brehm and Rahn (1997) and La Porta et al. (1996), finding that the theoretical mechanism for reciprocity grounded in game literature where, in single shot prisoner dilemma games, trusting players are more likely to cooperate (Kreps et al., 1982; Axelrod, 1984; Camerer & Thaler, 1995). In sum, political scientists borrow from economic game theorists and network analysts in order to advance the theoretical development of Social Capital and create the theoretical mechanism that Levi claims is lacking in Putnam’s work. Furthermore is the simple fact that trust based Social Capital persists as a strong predictor in contemporary voting among European citizens (Cox, 2003), as evidence in support of Putnam.

The second hypothesis and on the opposite side of to Putnam sits Jackman and Miller (1996) who largely reject the Social Capital argument, being critical of cultural explanations for political processes and in particular, for democratic performance. These criticisms centre around the thought that such a cultural approach makes several unsupported assumptions including that societal attitudes are coherent and only found in the aggregate, as well as assuming that these attitudes are extremely durable, having effects that last for centuries. As such, they are sceptical of Putnam’s theoretical justification and thus use his data to retest the proposition that political culture or civic life determines institutional performance and report little statistical justification for it. Henn, Weinstein and Hodgkinson (2007) similarly show that at best Social Capital only produces mixed results on political attitudes and certainly no

more so that socio-economic factors. While they do not go as far as Jackman and Miller in terms of completely disregarding the theory's applicability to civic life, they are certainly more than sceptical of a Putnam like relationship. Jackman and Miller will thus form the second hypothesis which will be subsequently tested and sit as the null hypothesis where Social Capital, as defined above, has no noticeable or significant effect on the level to which people engage and participate in politics. The line of thought taken by Henn, Weinstein and Hodgkinson (2007) will be used as the third hypothesis and sit between Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2 as a middle ground where it is not possible to say Social Capital has a definite and significant positive or negative effect but rather that it holds mixed results on engagement in politics.

The fourth and final hypothesis which will be tested as regards Social Capital and the one that this thesis supports by way of attempting to explain the current phenomena in British politics is that while participation in the traditional sense of voting has been reduced by the decline in Social Capital, the individualistic tendencies and lifestyle that have developed from this has in turn promoted a range of different forms of participation. Instead of voting for a party and the platform of policies which come with this the electorate are choosing instead to do things such as register to protest groups, partake in demonstrations or sign a petition for a particular issue or cause. People no longer have the sense of community that they once did and as such will choose not to vote for their community representative in Parliament but instead will choose to be politically active on an individual basis where they will act on issues which impact them or hold a greater importance to them, in a more isolated manner. Linked to this is the idea of "Chequebook Membership" where people will be associated with groups, parties and associations but only in a very loose manner, where they will not attend meetings or participate in the group's activities but simply pay the membership fee once a year. Associated but still atomised. On this account people are still engaging in politics and the

community; however they are just doing so in a more individualistic and distant sense. This is in some ways one of the main criticisms of the theory.

Some academics have claimed that these changing trends in engagement are merely an evolution. Barrie Stevens et al. (2000) suggest that in many countries a shift has only been observed from support of traditional organisations and institutions to newer forms of voluntary institutions rather than a decline in such groups. As part of this, people may now choose to join groups where individuals share the same beliefs as they do, with this no longer being based merely on locality and community ties. This could be done either in the “real” world or only virtually, on the internet, where the individuals involved may never actually meet or if so only very occasionally. This decline means people vote less and choose instead to engage in more atomised forms of participation such as protests based on their own self interest, wants and needs rather than working with others to achieve community goals and development in a wider sense. People previously felt some sense of duty to vote due to their sense of belonging to society and their community. This no longer necessarily applies under such a Social Capital line of thinking as that above. Putnam may argue that even if this is the case however, it still represents a decline in Social Capital and evidence of people creating networks and relationships around them. The thought that people are now able to, and are in fact, creating wider as well as different networks, both nationally and internationally, should not distract from the thought that these should be present in all spheres of their life and not just so for particular single issues. The building up of these new and different networks does not necessarily mean that there has not been a decline in Social Capital and should therefore not be used as a counter argument to the applicability of the theory.

Finally, it is important to note here that there is very little consensus among academics as to appropriate measures of Social Capital and how this should be done. However, a fundamental element of Social Capital in almost any conception of it is trust which Putnam (1993)

generally refers to as interpersonal relationships among other factors. He argues that trust facilitates collective action through networks of civic engagement, with this notion of social groups aiding the development of political skills equally being forwarded by Almond & Verba (1989) and Verba et al. (1995). Due to the nature of Social Capital and the debate surrounding both its definition and measurement, this will subsequently be discussed in detail in Chapter 4 as regards how it will be operationalised in order to perform the necessary analysis concerning the phenomena at hand and the theory's explanatory value.

Overall, Social Capital Theory explains the changing nature of political engagement through a decline in Social Capital, as measured and defined by a range of trust, norms and interpersonal and societal relationships. Despite the contested nature of the theory it has the potential to offer explanatory value and understanding as to the causes of the current trends in British politics.

Hypothesis 1 – Social Capital is positively correlated with all forms of political participation as suggested by Putnam, where the more Social Capital a community has, the greater the political participation will be.

Hypothesis 2 – Social Capital has no significant effect on political participation of any kind and therefore cannot be used as an explaining of trends in participation. Hence this sits in direct contrast to Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 3 – States that Social Capital has a mixed influence on political participation and thus has the potential to offer some insight.

Hypothesis 4 – Social Capital has the ability to explain both the downward trend in voting at British General Elections as well as the increase in alternative forms of engagement.

Cognitive Mobility:

Second, the theory of Cognitive Mobility goes about explaining the changing trends in British political participation in a different manner. The theory takes the approach that there has been an increase in education in Britain over the recent decades which has led to an increase in the cognitive ability of the electorate allowing them to process political information better than ever before and therefore no longer require the party attachments which they once did in order to make political decisions. The theory states that this has broadly been driven by an increased education level across Britain. Partisan alignment is then often used as an indicator of this trend and as evidence that it has an effect on political participation.

Cognitive Mobility theory therefore sees quite a dramatic shift away from early studies of electoral behaviour where analysis revealed that citizens in advance democracies tended to display long term loyalties to specific political parties in part as a shortcut to making political decisions (Campbell et al., 1960; Lazarsfield et al., 1944; Lipset & Rokkan, 1967; Rose & Urwin, 1970). Instead voters can now more comfortably assess the relative merits and drawbacks of both the policies and candidates political parties put forward before an election in what Dalton refers to as voters becoming “cognitively mobilised”(1984, 2007). This thought extends across Western Europe where research on political attitudes offers a portrait of more informed, better educated citizens whose level of political interest is rising with political concerns also extending to a growing range of issues (Flickinger & Studlar, 1992). Far from being an isolated phenomenon, scholars have observed trends away from long term party loyalties in a variety of countries. Indeed, Putnam et al. (2000: 17-18) actually note, “Seldom does such a diverse group of nations reveal so consistent a trend. The only major variation is in the timing of the decline.”

One of the potential indicators of the rise in Cognitive Mobility is the significant decline in partisan alignment in Britain, as measured by the dramatic fall in political party membership. In the post war period, Britain was viewed as a two-party system where the electorate was extremely partisan, with voters clearly identifying with one party or the other, and this trend continued up to the late 20th century. This decline has been evidenced in both the vote share of the two major parties as well as the significantly declining party membership. Whereas in the 1960s almost one in ten was a member of a political party, this had fallen a mere 0.8% of the electorate by 2013, representing a record low. From 2015, however, there has been a considerable increase in party membership, with this being predominantly driven by the Labour Party through their members orientated leadership elections, reaching 1.6% by July 2016. Instead of pure partisan alignment issue voting has taken precedent from this since around the 1980s suggesting that voters are now more open to rational argument, more willing to switch party allegiance, more influenced by the election campaign as well as assessments of both prospective policy issues or retrospective evaluations of a government's performance.

Dalton (2002) has suggested that this trend of partisan dealignment, where the electorate no longer identify and vote for one particular party in the long term, can be explained, across modern democracies, through a new awareness of civic participation through new social movements and single issue political organisations, especially for younger, better-educated and more politically skilful "new citizens". This is supported by the growth in people who now no longer state a preferred political party observed in both the US and Europe (Franklin et al., 1992), where citizens are now more likely to cast their ballot on the basis of issues rather than an underlying preference for a party (Nie et al., 1996). Admittedly there are several critics of this view that greater education in turn leads to partisan dealignment and therefore these more educated citizens will be more likely to vote for different parties from

one election to the next. Smith (1989) as well as Carpini and Keeter (1996) review data on Americans' political knowledge and conclude that despite attending school for longer, citizens remain abysmally under-informed about important basic facts, where the omnipresence of mass media is only helpful if the quality of information is sufficient. However, it is still possible to accept here that apartisans think and behave differently to that of partisans who hold some degree of long term party loyalty, even if this is accompanied by scepticism that these trends have been induced by access to better education as well as the mass media though increased political information. However, the assumption that will be taken here follows the work of Dalton where in general it is possible to suggest that greater levels of education leads to partisan dealignment as stated above. Dalton (1984, 2007) concedes that Cognitive Mobility and party identification historically have been positively correlated, as was demonstrated by early American National Election Studies (Campbell et al., 1960), however he argues that this relationship has changed. Dalton believes that the relationship between Cognitive Mobility and party identification must be changing for younger cohorts who are not only better educated but have also come of age in a milieu of constant media exposure which offers easy access to political information. He supports this claim with evidence that the aggregate number of cognitively mobilised non-partisans is increasing over time (2007).

Even should it not be accepted that increased education leads to greater partisan dealignment, it is not possible to deny that there has been a rise in the general education level in Britain throughout the time of this study. Across almost every measure of participation and attainment, the degree to which an individual in Britain is educated has risen quite dramatically where more people now go on to attain post 16 year old qualifications in the form of A Levels and BTECs as well as degrees at university. This increase in education cannot automatically be equated with an increased ability to understand and engage in

politics and this linkage will be discussed and solved subsequently in the thesis as it moves to operationalising the theory for analysis.

Partisan delalignment is not the only result of the spread of cognitively mobilised citizens as this evolution is equally giving citizens the tools to engage in other, potentially more demanding forms of political participation. Citizens are seeing that elections offer them only a rather rare opportunity to influence the politics of the next few years and equally that the policy choices on offer here tend to be narrow and potentially failing to provide an adequate representation of their views. As such, many are now making the choice to engage in alternative forms of participation which allow them more frequent opportunity as well as the ability to pursue policies and ideas from a much broader base rather than merely those offered by the main political parties. Equally, in terms of their individual vote, a person knows that their influence as one of tens of thousands in their constituency alone is of little worth meaning they may see little point in actually casting their ballot as it is unlikely to have any real benefit. Depending on their constituency, or system, this worth can obviously increase and decrease quite substantially. On the reverse side of this the same individual may see increased marginal benefit of attending issue specific protests and trying to shape government policy on an issue by issue basis rather than opting for a platform of policies which will then be enacted by the chosen government over the course of Parliament. The electorate are now more able to assess the relative merits and drawbacks of different forms of participation.

The above description again leads to several hypotheses which will be tested in Chapter 5 to assess to ability of Cognitive Mobility in explaining and understanding the current phenomena in British politics where voting turnout is experiencing a decline whereas other forms of participation are seeing an increase. The first of these, and the thought that will form Hypothesis 5, is that as the electorate become, in Dalton's words, "Cognitively Mobilised"

this will increase overall political participation. With voters becoming politically sophisticated through Dalton's two suggested developments of the public's increased ability to process political information twinned with a decrease in the cost of acquiring political information, they are now much closer to Schumpeter's (1950) ideal citizen. As such they are more likely to vote in the General Election, making this decision independently rather than based purely on long-term party attachments and equally more likely to engage in other forms of politics such as signing a petition, in other words extending their civic consciousness.

On the reverse of this and the thought of Hypothesis 6, is that Cognitive Mobilisation actually has no effect on political participation and cannot therefore be used to explain any of the current phenomena in British politics. Such an argument is forward by Albright (2009) who claims that Cognitive Mobility is not consistent with the current trends of dealignment and instead that the opposite is instead occurring where Cognitive Mobility actually increases the likelihood a respondent expresses an attachment to a specific party, and this positive relationship does not change across cohorts. Other proponents of this line of thought believe that education has a very weak, if any, positive impact on voter turnout in Britain, even if such as link has been shown more solidly in other advanced democracies such as the US. Wattenburg (2002) notes that the relationship between education and turnout is particularly weak in Britain, while Clark et al. (2004) further support this claim with their findings that education had no effect on turnout in the 2001 General Election.

The third and final hypothesis as regards the theory of Cognitive Mobility, forming Hypothesis 7 of the thesis, is the one which this thesis will take as it looks to explain the decline in voter turnout twinned with the increase in less traditional means of political participation. Therefore this hypothesis states that increased Cognitive Mobilisation throughout Britain has led to this as by where individuals now wish to be engaged in the political sphere more than once every five years by voting in the General Election. As such,

they now feel that there is both more influential as well as more continuous ways in which to do so. This involves placing a lesser importance upon voting and instead turning to these other forms. This is only possible due to the increased education and cognitive mobilisation discussed previously which allows the electorate to have access to and understand a very broad range of political material and in turn react to these appropriately in ways which they would not have been able to before. Instead of voting they may decide to join an activist group to lobby government on a particular issue such as the environment or organise a protest about a local or national issue. Both of these can be done at any time and offer a much more targeted approach to influencing government. The result of this will be a lower voter turnout at General Elections, while participation in other forms of politics such as signing a petition or attending a demonstration will increase.

Overall, Cognitive Mobility Theory attempts to explain the changing nature of political participation in Britain by suggesting that as people have become better educated their engagement in the political sphere has been impacted. It is the nature of this impact which is central as to whether or not Cognitive Mobility theory will have any power in explaining the current trends in British political participation. Cognitive Mobility is not a contested concept like Social Capital and therefore is much easier to define than its theoretical counterpart, however the effect it has on an individual's propensity to vote, voting turnout on the aggregate level as well as political participation more broadly equally lacks academic consensus. It has undoubtedly mixed findings however in a similar way to that of the other theories has the potential to hold considerable explanatory value in this study. Even if it is not agreed upon as to what the effect of Cognitive Mobility is on either voting turnout or political participation more broadly, there is a general academic consensus that it does have an effect of some kind.

Hypothesis 5 – Cognitive Mobility is directly correlated to political participation whereby an increase in Cognitive Mobility will result in an increase in political participation.

Hypothesis 6 – States that Cognitive Mobility has no effect on political participation and thus cannot be used to explain recent trends in British political engagement.

Hypothesis 7 – Cognitive Mobility has the ability to explain the dual trends of falling turnout at General Elections as well as increasing engagement in alternative forms of participation.

General Incentives:

The final theory which will be tested as regards the current trends in British politics is the General Incentives Model (Whitely et al., 1994; Whitely & Seyd, 2002) which works on a cost-benefit analysis premise where participants will assess and weigh up the costs and benefits of different participation forms including voting and then from this calculation decide whether or not to engage, in each respectively. As such the theory sits under the broad umbrella of the Individual Rationality framework pioneered by Downs (1957) in his classic study of *“An Economic Theory of Democracy”*. As suggested by this name, the theory has generally had its greatest application in the field of economics and the decision making process within this, it has the potential to offer an insight to the trends experienced in Britain and can easily be applied to this situation of political participation. In this sense, individuals will choose whether to engage in the various means of political participation available to them based upon such an analysis. For example they will choose whether or not to vote based on the benefits and costs of this action and an overall evaluation and calculation of the two. Here the benefits of voting would pertain to expectations regarding differences in public policy goods that would be provided by the various political parties should they win the

election. On the other hand, costs refer to estimates of the amount of time and effort required to go to the polls and cast a ballot (Clarke et al., 2004). The General Incentives Model thus appears a very logical theory and would at first seem to fit with what many would describe as their decision making process in terms of considering the positives and negatives of undertaking a certain action in many different spheres, not solely the political one.

General Incentives Theory addresses the paradox of participation that plagues Rational Choice Theory by incorporating ideas as to why rational individuals may engage in collective action. Rational Choice Theory struggles to explain the paradox that people actually choose to vote or otherwise engage in politics when they have very little chance individually of actually influencing the outcome (Riker & Ordeshook, 1973; Green & Shapiro, 1994; Laver, 1997). Given the enormous size of electorates in modern democracies, the ‘pivotality probability’ – the calculated probability of casting a deciding vote which enables a most preferred (utility providing) party to win and prevents less preferred (less utility providing) parties from doing so – for any General Election will almost certainly be insignificantly small, regardless of the electoral system (e.g Gelman, King & Boscardin, 1998; Gelman & Katz, 2001). This thought can be easily extended across other forms of participation, where the chance of one extra person attending a protest to lobby government or signing a petition, will almost certainly not make the protest successful, in terms of stimulating appropriate government action, although it is admittedly much more difficult to quantify such a contribution. For example, such a model, along with its Rational Choice counterparts, has been tested by Whitely and Seyd (1996) in order to understand party activism as regards the Labour Party in Britain. Here they find that these models each possess some explanatory power and where combined into what they describe as a “reduced form” model provides the best explanatory account, although each has something to say. General Incentives must therefore incorporate new ideas which recognise that people may join several types of groups,

including large, “latent” ones. Given the size of these latter groups, a person is unable to “make a noticeable contribution to any group effort, and since no one in the group will react if he makes a contribution, he has no incentive to contribute” (Olson, 1965:50). Therefore it is necessary for the group to attempt to change a rational individual’s preferences so that he will chose to participate in a “group orientated way”. These efforts must involve mobilizing the “capacity for action...with the aid of ‘selective incentives’” (Olson, 1965:51). Hence, these incentives increase the sense of benefit or utility received over the perception of costs incurred. To receive the utility unrelated to the collective goods being produced by the group, the individual must participate. In other words, changing the way in which the individual views the collective nature of the group’s action will equally, in turn change the pay off that the individual will calculate when choosing whether or not to engage.

As is well known, many different kinds of incentives for voting have been suggested by various academics, from those which are material, social and moral (e.g. Olson, 1965) through to those that are instrumental, expressive or normative (Butler and Stokes, 1969: 24-5). However, the General Incentives Model centres around the key ideas of calculation and psychology combining in human decision making to motivate people to participate. This applies not only to voting as would be the case in many early applications of the model, but as discussed above, equally to many other forms of political participation such as those discussed in this thesis.

Moving to the construction of the model, General Incentives begins, as alluded to, from the starting point of Rational Choice Theory with the three explanatory variables of political efficacy, collective benefits and costs with Clarke et al. (2004) then detailing the construction of the model well from this point. In addition to the original three variables mentioned, four other variables are added to create the new General Incentives Model. These incentive benefits constitute alternative benefits as well as specific norms, with these benefits and

norms reflecting the thought that an individual's sense of 'being implicated' in the political system is fundamental to the determination of the costs and benefits of participation, in whatever form that may be. Specifically, these four benefits consist of individual, group, system and expressive benefits. First, individual benefits refers to one's sense of personal or private reward that results directly from voting in an election or from other forms of participation. Second and in contrast to this is the group benefits which go neither to only members of one's family and other primary related groups and nor to everyone in the electorate. Instead, these benefits flow to people who are seen as similar to oneself or are in need of a 'helping hand'. Third, system benefits are those which accrue to a democratic political order when citizens vote. Recognition of a healthy democracy comes in the form of people voting when given the chance at a General Election but other forms of participation such as signing a petition or attending a demonstration in order to lobby government on a particular issue are equally a sign of a healthy and functioning democracy. Finally, expressive benefits are those which recognise the sense of satisfaction that people receive when they demonstrate their support for political actors, institutions or processes. As such this definition has more obvious broad applicability to both traditional and less traditional forms of participation.

Social norms are then the last component of the General Incentives Model, as outlined by Clarke et al. (2004) with the argument that such social norms form an important part of the socio-political context in which people make choices regarding whether to vote, to participate in other ways, or alternatively deciding to do nothing. These norms may be internalised or externalised by the individual, however either way they must be credible in order to have an effect. This effect is a resultant of the communication as to which behaviours are appropriate, expected and rewarded by others, as well as which behaviours are not. In other words, it matters what those around us do as well as their views on various forms of political

participation. Should those around us and those significant to us vote and partake in other forms of politics and believe that they are important, this will in turn have a potent effect on our perceived norms and thus impact our personal cost-benefit calculations.

Here, each individual is attempting to maximise their political efficacy which is a measure of a person's sense of being able to exert political influence. These feelings of political efficacy are derived from an individual's estimations of resources and their perceptions of the responsiveness of the political system. It is possible to argue that given any one individual and their limited resources, the vast majority of the electorate should not feel particularly politically efficacious; however, these feelings can be heightened by being 'collectivised'. This refers to the thought that people begin to think about the potential influence they can exert themselves as well as others whom they view as being similar to themselves. As such, their political efficacy as a group is massively increased and will be viewed as such by each individual participant.

Despite logical foundations and its attempt to overcome the participation paradox of Rational Choice Theory, General Incentives attracts a large amount of criticism as regards its applicability to the real world; however some of these will be weakened by the shift in application from economics to political participation. The greatest of these is that individuals simply do not have the cognitive ability to be able to process and analyse the mass of information available to them in order to make what would theoretically be considered the rational decision; the one that would produce the greatest benefit. While theoretically each individual would calculate all the appropriate factors and variables in a cost-benefit nature, this assumption is simply unrealistic. Further to this is the fundamental flaw that individuals may well not have all the necessary information available to them to begin with, even if they did have the cognitive ability to process this. In the political sphere it is much more defined as to what institutional forms of participation can achieve and the costs of engaging in these.

Again, with the example of voting, most of the electorate have a fair understanding of the costs that are involved in casting their ballot and equally would largely understand the potential outcome depending on the style of electoral system. In Britain this obviously involves voting for a constituency MP and then these in turn forming the government through the largest party. Similarly, most will have a broad understanding of the makeup of their particular constituency and the chances of their vote making a difference in the outcome of it, in the sense of it being a safe or swing seat. This links back in some ways to the theory of Cognitive Mobility outlined above where it would be suggested that in the modern day, more than ever before, members of the electorate have the ability to understand issues and the best way in which to attempt to influence government policy in their desired manner.

From this description of the theory it is once again possible to draw three hypotheses which can be subsequently tested in Chapter 6. The first is Hypothesis 8 which follows the beliefs that of Clarke et al. (2004) who found the General Incentives Model to be a good predictor of electoral turnout in Britain however, in order to make this appropriate for the trends in this study, other forms of participation will also be included within this. Therefore using this and changes within it has the potential to increase political participation across the board, both in the institutionalised sense of voting at a General Election, as well as other forms of engagement such as signing a petition.

The second hypothesis (Hypothesis 9) will go directly against this view and will form a null hypothesis whereby the General Incentives Model offers very little explanatory power in either forms of political participation and therefore has very little value in this sense. This would complement the view of the likes of Hindess (1988), Lowi (1992) and Eckstein (1992) who claim that any such Rational Choice Models of participation do not have any use in explaining political action. Here there would therefore be very little significance on any of the variables measured on either voting or that of other forms of participation. The third and

final of the hypothesis for General Incentives and Hypothesis 10, of the thesis will be the one which this thesis is looking to forward by which the General Incentives Model can explain both the trend of declining electoral turnout in General Elections in Britain as well as offering an insight into the rising levels of engagement in other forms of politics. Support of this hypothesis would require the appropriate positive and negative effects of certain variables as well as the full theory on both types of participation.

Before concluding however, it is important to briefly but clearly distinguish between the latter two theories detailed above as there is potential for them to overlap in terms of an individuals decision on firstly whether they will engage in politics and then secondly how they will choose to do this. Cognitive Mobility Theory posits that as an electorate, Britain is now better able to assess the payoffs that are a result of each form of participation available to the individual. A citizen can now better understand issues and then act appropriately in order to engage in such a manner which will produce the best possible outcome from their point of view. On the other hand, General Incentives Theory, approaches this from a different angle in that the payoffs themselves have changed independent of the ability of the electorate to assess these. While previously voting was possibly the most effective way by which to affect government policy there is now a much broader array of potential ways in which to do this and these may have greater potency in a world dominated by media coverage, twenty four hour news and readily available social media channels. Hence, in the modern day it is possible to be continuously engaged in politics at the touch of a button which allows for both individual engagement as well as encouraging others to participate as well as informing them. All of the above has ultimately resulted in a changed cost benefit pay off structure as regards political participation.

Overall, General Incentives Theory attempts to explain the changing nature of political engagement in Britain by addressing the changing pay offs of the various forms of political

participation through the evolving nature of politics as well as a broader range of potential avenues with which to participate becoming available, particularly with the development of the internet and social media. As this has taken place, individuals have begun to adapt the way they choose to engage and participate within politics and in turn this has seen a move away from just voting every five years in the General Election to a much more diverse and continuous portfolio of participation which may well include choosing not to vote at all due to the perceived pay off. The way in which the theory builds upon that of Rational Choice is crucial to its potential success in having any explanatory value in the twinned phenomena observed in British politics of declining electoral turnout and a rise in engagement in politics through other forms.

Hypothesis 8 – General Incentives is a good predictor of political participation as stated by Clarke et al. (2004) and thus as these incentives increase so will overall political participation.

Hypothesis 9 – The General Incentives Model offers very little explanatory power in terms of political participation.

Hypothesis 10 – General Incentives can explain both the fall in electoral turnout as well as the rise in engagement in other forms of participation.

To conclude this chapter, these are the three independent theories which will be subsequently tested throughout this thesis in order to understand to what extent, if any, each one can assist in explaining the current phenomena at hand and then in turn what this means for political participation in Britain moving forward, including any policy implications that this may potentially lead to.

Data and Methodology:

This chapter will detail the data set chosen for this thesis and then secondly turn to outline the methods used for analysing each of the three theories potential role in explaining the current phenomena seen within engagement in British politics over the last 30 years respectively.

It is necessary for the data set used in this thesis to fit certain criteria. First, it must include questions which not only encompass each of the three theories which are being tested in relation to the changing trends in British political participation but rather to include each of the different aspects of the three theories. Each is not merely premised upon one variable but multiple different factors and this must therefore be present in any relevant data set. Second, any appropriate data set must have asked these questions over the necessary period of time in order for the trends to be measured and in turn linked back to the results of each theory. Next, the data set must then equally offer a fair sample of the population in order to ensure statistical credibility as well as allowing the conclusions to have broad applicability. Finally, the data must offer a number of consistent variables which permit for controls to be applied to the analysis and subsequently this will allow for the results to be confirmed independently and for there to be no suggestion that any relationship is being driven by other factors such as age or the level of education someone has received.

Therefore, this thesis uses data collected as part of the BSA survey between 1983 and 2015, thus including the most recent data available at the time of analysis. The survey is run by NatCen who are Britain's largest independent social research organisation and as such it is used by government, journalists as well as academics as a critical gauge of public opinion due its credibility and reliability. As a non for profit organisation all research undertaken by

NatCen, is not in any way compromised by commercial or political agendas meaning it offers an appropriately independent data set for this thesis.

The BSA Survey is NatCen's longest running survey and consists of asking 3000 respondents about what it is like to live in Britain and how they feel the country is run each year. This focuses primarily upon respondents' social, political and moral attitudes and the changes that have been seen in these over time. While year on year new questions are added in order to reflect the current issues of the day, there is a clear emphasis on designing the questions with a view to repeating them periodically allowing changes and trends to be tracked and charted over time. Thus this provides the ideal platform to chart the trends in political participation which this thesis is looking to consider. In terms of selection, participants are chosen through a method of random probability sampling ensuring that everyone has a fair chance of being picked as a respondent as well as making the results representative of the population as a whole. Once a participant is selected they are then interviewed in their homes by one of NatCen's interviewers in order to ensure that the survey is completed correctly, the recorded answers offer a fair representation of the responses and that there is consistency across the way the survey is conducted with each selected participant. Finally, when responding to the survey, participants' are also asked a wide range of personal questions such as their age, employment status and whether they support a political party. As mentioned, this level of analysis will prove important later on when applying controls to the data and regressions.

As is clear, the BSA Survey fits the four criteria outlined above and is thus the best data set to use in this thesis.

Next, moving on to the methodology, this consists of two distinct parts. First it is necessary to confirm whether there is a statistically significant relationship between each of the respective theories and political participation, and then secondly should the relevant trends in these

variables move in the necessary directions. Individually these two elements are necessary but not sufficient, however when combined they allow the explanatory power of each to be conclusively confirmed or denied.

Due to the nature of the variables at hand, the analysis will initially comprise of a number of binary logistic regressions in order to assess the relationship between the three theories respectively and the participants engagement in politics, both in terms of voting as well as alternative forms of participation. This style of analysis will remain identical across the three theories while the specific variables being used will obviously change in order to reflect the relevant theory. The individual components of each will first be considered for their significance before the theory is analysed in a holistic manner with each component combined in a single model.

Each theory will be measured on three different independent variables; whether an individual voted, an individual's view on voting and finally, whether an individual engaged in other forms of political participation. Whether an individual voted in the last General Election provides evidence of the most traditional means of political engagement by voting at the ballot box. However, this only offers a limited insight due to its binary nature where the participant either voted in the last election or did not and therefore the second variable is important in terms of offering a more detailed picture as to why someone may or not vote. Also, due to the nature of General Elections and the fact they only take place approximately every five years, this limits the available sample size. Hence, the second variable considered is that of the participant's View on Voting and this offers three different responses for the participant to choose from and identify with. It also has the advantage of offering a larger sample size as the question can be asked in any year rather than just those in which there was a General Election. These categories are first that there is "*No Point in Voting*", second believing that people should "*Only Vote When They Care Who Wins*" and finally believing

that *"It is Everyone's Duty to Vote"*. As there are three categories here, the responses will be treated as categorical variables and hence the first response of believing that there is *"No Point in Voting"* will be used as a reference category with the latter two responses being measured against this in order to establish whether the theory orientated variables impact the movement between these Views on Voting. (The methodology as regards General Incentives will differ slightly, however this will be discussed in the relevant theory chapter).

It is then necessary to turn to consider the other side of the current trends as regards the increase in alternative means of participation such as signing a petition, attending a demonstration or becoming part of an activist group. This will be measured by whether the participant has engaged in one or more of these types of political participation. Using these three different variables to assess the theories of Social Capital, Cognitive Mobility and General Incentives will offer an understanding as to what extent each of the theories is able to explain the two phenomena that Britain has experienced; firstly that of a decline in voting turnout and secondly, an increase in participation of alternative means within politics.

As stated above, in order for a theory to hold explanatory power it must prove to be both statistically significant and then second the necessary trends in these variables must also be present. Therefore once each theory has been tested for statistical significance it is necessary to show these associated trends which make these regressions relevant to the study. For example, as regards Cognitive Mobility it will be necessary to clearly show that Britain has experienced both a decline in political party membership as well as the general increase in educational attainment. The regressions and the results they produce are only relevant and useful with these two aspects together. The variables chosen to represent each of the three theories under consideration will be outlined in the respective sections as part of the analysis.

As stated, the regressions are binary logistic in nature as these offer a much more realistic set of results which are applicable to the real world through their interpretations as opposed to a linear regression which can produce illogical results within the field of political participation. Real world interpretations are clearly of great importance and have been prioritised in order to ensure the relevance of the results. However, what will not be shown by these initial regressions is potential underlying driving factors of any relationships found and therefore as previously alluded to it is necessary to apply various sets of controls to identify if this is the case and whether a relationship can be explained, fully or in part, through a third variable or set of variables. This will include controlling for Year Fixed Effects in each of the initial regressions in order to ensure any effect is consistent. However, in addition to this the analysis will comprise of two distinct control sets, with Year Fixed Effects running across both of these. First will be the Personal set of controls and this will include the individual characteristics of:

- Age
- Gender – Male/Female
- Marital Status – Married, Separated or Divorced, Widowed and Never Married
- Religion – No Religion, Christian of No Denomination, Roman Catholic, Church of England (CoE), United Reform Church (URC), Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Other Christian, Hindu, Jew and Muslim

Second, Economic and Political factors will be controlled for and this will include:

- Employment Status – Full Time, Part Time, Full Time Self Employed, Part Time Self Employed, Unemployed, Waiting to Work, Looking After Home, Retired, Full Time Education and Other
- Supports a Political Party – Yes/No

- Housing Status – Own Home, Rent NT/Council, Rent Other and N/A
- Reads a newspaper 3 or more times a week – Yes/No

Both of these control sets will hold the data constant for the relevant factors and from this it will be possible to observe whether any effect that was originally present is still so once these are in place. The two control sets will first be applied individually in order to give a more specific insight before being applied in tandem as a full test as to the stability of the effect. Where the control variable is a categorical variable, the first category will be removed from the analysis to act as a reference which each subsequent category will be compared to in a series of binary regressions. This is done for the sake of simplicity when conducting and interpreting the analysis. For example, when controlling for Marital Status the reference category will be that an individual is Married.

The way in which the analysis has been undertaken means that the data from each year has been pooled together and thus that it is only possible to state that on average there is an association between two variables across this time period rather than that this relationship is necessarily present in each and every year. In order to achieve this it would be necessary to undertake further steps and this could potentially be done in future work. For the purposes of this thesis however; looking to confirm the relevance of each of the three theories, the style of analysis completed here will offer a comprehensive set of conclusions.

Overall, this process will produce a series of regressions which can be used to analyse each theory against political engagement in Britain, both through voting and other forms, using the three individual measures detailed above. By then comparing these significance levels to the trends which have been observed over the defined period, it will then be possible to confirm the degree, if any, of explanatory power each of the theories holds.

Social Capital:

This chapter will now build upon the discussion in the above Theory Chapter in terms of how Social Capital will be operationalised in order to assess its applicability in explaining and understanding the joint phenomena in British political participation of declining voter turnout and the increase in engagement in politics through less traditional means such as joining a protest group or attending a demonstration. The necessary regression tables, and detailed descriptions of them, will follow this discussion before the chapter turns to consider the appropriate trends in line with these regressions. Finally, there will be an in-depth analysis of the overall explanatory power of Social Capital, drawing upon both necessary aspects, and finally concluding as to the degree to which it can be considered insightful in the case of changing trends in British political participation.

Despite Social Capital being a contested concept without any academic consensus on its precise definition, nor in exactly how it should be measured, there is broad agreement on certain central claims of the theory. This thesis will assess Social Capital from the two separate but very much interconnected aspects of societal trust and community networks. These will cover the definition of Social Capital in the very broad sense of which it is being used and provide a clear picture of both the overall view as well as the individual elements defined within this. As stated, the first of these is trust, where greater levels of trust within society and among people in a community is conducive to collective action between members of a community and general engagement in civic society. In order to operationalise this measure the variable *“Most People Can Be Trusted”* will be used which is a binary response variable. The options given to the respondent are that either *“Most People Can Be Trusted”* or the opposite where *“You cannot be too careful when dealing with other people”*. The second aforementioned concept which holds broad consensus among Social Capital theorists works along relatively similar lines to that of trust within a society or a community and

regards networks within these. In the same way that trust is conducive to collective action, the networks that people have around them with other people equally have the ability to do this. The length of time an individual has lived in their neighbourhood will be used as a proxy here for these networks. It is more than reasonable to make the association between living somewhere for a greater period of time and this allowing for a greater attachment to the community and a greater network of people and organisations within this. The longer an individual has lived in a particular neighbourhood, the more opportunity they will have had to build up networks of people and relationships with those around them from various parts of their life including work, sport and socially. While this will depend in part on the personality of the individual involved, as a general trend this remains extremely plausible.

While there are other possible ways to measure the level of Social Capital in a given community, region or nation, and the changes in it over time, these do not offer such a direct measurement. For example Halpren (2009b) shows that communities with a good “stock” of Social Capital are more likely to benefit from lower crime figures, better health, higher educational attainment and better economic growth. It is obviously relatively straightforward to measure these however they do not reveal the causal effect that other forms of measurement offer. Hence, the variables of trust and length of time lived in neighbourhood provide a much better theoretical grounding to work from compared to the other alternatives.

Results:

This section will now detail the regression tables produced in order to assess the applicability of Social Capital in explaining the current phenomena of participation in British politics. This will begin with tables where the two aforementioned variables of trust and the length of time someone has lived in their neighbourhood have been tested independently for the effect they have on voting, views on voting as well as other forms of political participation. However,

following this, the two will be combined in order to create a full Social Capital model and from here it will be possible to assess whether the variables are significant both independently as well as when combined in this full model.

It is observable from Tables 1 and 2 that the length of time which an individual has lived in their given neighbourhood has no significant effect on their view on voting. This is the case between believing both there to be “*No point in voting*” and believing “*People should only vote when they care who wins*” as well as between believing there is “*No point in voting*” and believing that “*It is everyone’s duty to vote*”. As regards the first table, this effect is shown to be consistently insignificant regardless of any set of controls that is placed upon the relationship. However, in the case of the second, the relationship originally proves statistically significant, yet is then explained by a number of Personal as well as Political and Economic factors meaning that once these are in place the relationship disappears and becomes insignificant.

Table 1 - Views on Voting between "No Point in Voting" and "People Should Only Vote When They Care Who Wins"

Variable				
Lived in Neighbourhood	-0.001 (0.002)	-0.002 (0.003)	-0.003 (0.003)	-0.003 (0.003)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	No	No	Yes
Personal	No	Yes	No	Yes
Economic and Political	No	No	Yes	Yes
N	0.01	0.018	0.084	0.091
Nagelkerke Pseudo R²	3474	3474	3474	3474

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

Table 2 - Views on Voting between "No Point in Voting" and "It is Everyone's Duty To Vote"

Variable				
Lived in Neighbourhood	0.015***	-0.004	0.006*	-0.004
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	No	No	Yes
Personal	No	Yes	No	Yes
Economic and Political	No	No	Yes	Yes
N	0.021	0.099	0.201	0.237
Nagelkerke Pseudo R²	7390	7390	7390	7390

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

Tables 3 and 4 then show that the opposite is true as regards the effect trust has upon an individual's view on voting between the two same comparisons as above. The first table, shows the effect of trust on an individual's view between believing that there is "*No point in voting*" or that "*People should only vote when they care who wins*" and demonstrates that this effect is relatively stable regardless of any controls which are applied although the Political and Economic controls do reduce the effect slightly. The size of this effect approximately doubles in the second table, as would be expected due to the larger jump in opinion of voting, now between believing either that no one should vote and that contrasting that it is everyone's duty to do so. However, despite the larger magnitude the same happens in terms of the Political and Economic set of controls reducing the effect slightly, with the effect remains largely constant throughout.

Table 3 - Views on Voting between "No Point in Voting" and "People Should Only Vote When They Care Who Wins"

Variable				
Most People Can Be Trusted	0.481*** (0.080)	0.472*** (0.082)	0.359*** (0.083)	0.364*** (0.085)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	No	No	Yes
Personal	No	Yes	No	Yes
Economic and Political	No	No	Yes	Yes
N	0.052	0.065	0.114	0.133
Nagelkerke Pseudo R²	3203	3203	3203	3203

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

Table 4 - Views on Voting between "No Point in Voting" and "It is Everyone's Duty To Vote"

Variable				
Most People Can Be Trusted	0.892*** (0.070)	0.874*** (0.073)	0.733*** (0.075)	0.721*** (0.076)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	No	No	Yes
Personal	No	Yes	No	Yes
Economic and Political	No	No	Yes	Yes
N	0.059	0.140	0.243	0.274
Nagelkerke Pseudo R²	6897	6897	6897	6897

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

From these first few tables it is possible to conclude that Social Capital only has mixed results on an individual's view on voting and therefore it is inconclusive overall as to the effect of increasing or decreasing levels of Social Capital on how people view the act of voting.

Moving next to consider the effect of Social Capital upon actual voting there is a much stronger evidence for the effect of Social Capital. From Table 5 it is clearly observable that

should someone believe that most people in society are trustworthy it is more likely that that individual will have voted in the last General Election. This effect is slightly reduced when Economic and Political controls are applied and then once again when all controls are applied together, however, throughout it remains highly statistically significant and positive meaning the above conclusion retains its validity.

Table 5 – Voted

Variable				
Most People Can Be Trusted	0.576***	0.532***	0.441***	0.383***
	(0.051)	(0.054)	(0.055)	(0.057)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	No	No	Yes
Personal	No	Yes	No	Yes
Economic and Political	No	No	Yes	Yes
N	0.028	0.157	0.225	0.279
Nagelkerke Pseudo R²	8495	8495	8495	8495

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

In a similar manner, Table 6 demonstrates that the longer someone has lived in their given neighbourhood, the more likely it is that they will have voted in the last General Election, with this effect remaining positively significant despite any set of controls which were put in place, including age which may have been expected to heavily contribute to this association.

Table 6 – Voted

Variable				
Lived in Neighbourhood	0.021*** (0.002)	0.007*** (0.002)	0.016*** (0.002)	0.006** (0.002)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	No	No	Yes
Personal	No	Yes	No	Yes
Economic and Political	No	No	Yes	Yes
N	0.053	0.143	0.154	0.212
Nagelkerke Pseudo R²	8651	8651	8651	8651

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

From the two tables above it is clearly observable that an increase in Social Capital, as measured by the given variables, has a very strong, positive effect upon the propensity of an individual to vote in a General Election.

Having considered the first trend of electoral decline, it is now necessary to consider the effect of Social Capital on alternative forms of political participation. From Tables 7 and 8 it is again observable that Social Capital has a significant positive effect on other forms of political engagement such as signing a petition or attending a demonstration. Both of these effects remain relatively stable across each set of controls which are applied to the relationships respectively although the magnitude of the latter effect is much greater.

Table 7 - Other Political Participation

Variable				
Most People Can Be Trusted	0.476*** (0.086)	0.485*** (0.087)	0.372*** (0.088)	0.397*** (0.089)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	No	No	Yes
Personal	No	Yes	No	Yes
Economic and Political	No	No	Yes	Yes
N	0.012	0.038	0.049	0.065
Nagelkerke Pseudo R²	7587	7587	7587	7587

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

Table 8 - Other Political Participation

Variable				
Lived in Neighbourhood	0.074*** (0.002)	0.084*** (0.002)	0.080*** (0.002)	0.085*** (0.002)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	No	No	Yes
Personal	No	Yes	No	Yes
Economic and Political	No	No	Yes	Yes
N	0.012	0.382	0.373	0.387
Nagelkerke Pseudo R²	15424	15424	15424	15424

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

The tables thus far have considered the effect of Social Capital on each of voting, views on voting and other forms of participation through the two measures independently, it is now necessary to build the combined model of Social Capital, with both variables present in order to assess if Social Capital as a whole is driving these effects rather than just these variables individually. The subsequent four tables will therefore provide a summary of the Social Capital model as a whole on each of the aforementioned measures of political engagement. In each case, N will be kept consistent and therefore may differ to that of the same effect in the

previous tables. This is necessary in order to ensure any effect is observable and not distorted by differing sample sizes. Equally, in each of the tables, all controls will be in place for each relationship, rather than these being built up as was done in the previous models.

The following two tables confirm the findings in Tables 1 and 2 whereby there is inconclusive evidence as to the effect of Social Capital upon an individual's view of voting between both believing that there is "*No point in voting*" or that "*People should only vote when they care who wins*" as well as believing there to be "*No point in voting*" and believing "*It is everyone's duty to vote*" respectively. The only change from when the variables were measured separately as opposed to in this full Social Capital model is that the effect of trust is reduced slightly in significance.

Table 9 - Views on Voting between "No Point in Voting" and "People Should Only Vote When They Care Who Wins" Summary

Variable			
Most People Can Be Trusted	0.297** (0.114)		0.299** (0.114)
Lived in Neighbourhood		0.000 (0.004)	0.001 (0.004)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	Yes	Yes
Personal	Yes	Yes	Yes
Economic and Political	Yes	Yes	Yes
Nagelkerke Pseudo R²	0.097	0.092	0.097
N	1836	1836	1836

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

Table 10 - Views on Voting between "No Point in Voting" and "It is Everyone's Duty To Vote" Summary

Variable			
Most People Can Be Trusted	0.684*** (0.107)		0.683*** (0.107)
Lived in Neighbourhood		-0.002 (0.004)	-0.001 (0.004)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	Yes	Yes
Personal	Yes	Yes	Yes
Economic and Political	Yes	Yes	Yes
Nagelkerke Pseudo R²	0.259	0.242	0.259
N	4012	4012	4012
***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05			

Table 11 then moves to consider the effect of Social Capital upon the choice of whether or not to actually vote. This model again only acts to further support the case above and in turn proves to increase the significance of the length of time that someone has lived in their neighbourhood has on an individual's choice to abstain or vote in the General Election. Given this result it can be confidently stated that increased Social Capital has the effect of an increased propensity to vote regardless of any other driving factors which may be present.

Table 11 - Voting Summary

Variable			
Most People Can Be Trusted	0.378*** (0.072)		0.386*** (0.072)
Lived in Neighbourhood		0.011*** (0.003)	0.011*** (0.003)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	Yes	Yes
Personal	Yes	Yes	Yes
Economic and Political	Yes	Yes	Yes
Nagelkerke Pseudo R²	0.283	0.281	0.287
N	5277	5277	5277
***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05			

Finally, Table 12 offers perhaps the most interesting finding of this compilation of tables involving the complete Social Capital model with the effect that Social Capital has upon the level to which people engage in other forms of political participation much more ambiguous than it was when the two variables were considered individually. First, the effect of trust, while remaining significant is reduced, but secondly, the effect of the length of time that someone has lived in their neighbourhood, while previously significant and of a positive nature, is reduced to a point where it becomes statistically insignificant.

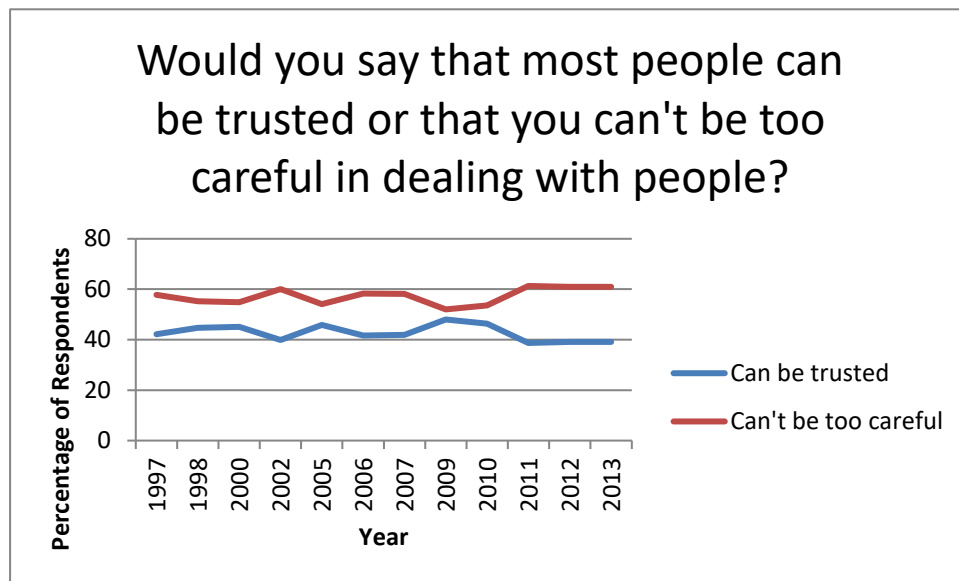
Table 12 - Other Participation Summary

Variable			
Most People Can Be Trusted	0.336**		0.330**
	(0.103)		(0.103)
Lived in Neighbourhood		-0.004	-0.004
		(0.003)	(0.003)
Fixed Year Effect	Yes	Yes	Yes
Personal	Yes	Yes	Yes
Economic and Political	Yes	Yes	Yes
Nagelkerke Pseudo R²	0.072	0.068	0.073
N	5362	5362	5362
***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05			

Trends:

Having shown the level of statistical significance across the Social Capital variables it is obviously now necessary to show that Social Capital has in fact declined in Britain, in a similar way to that suggested by Putnam in the US. It needs to be shown that Social Capital has declined over the given period in order to compare this to the trends seen in political participation. This will be done by observing the trends of the two variables used to measure Social Capital, that of trust and the length of time an individual has lived in their neighbourhood. As previously mentioned, despite any significance, this is largely irrelevant without the necessary trends to accompany them.

Chart 3



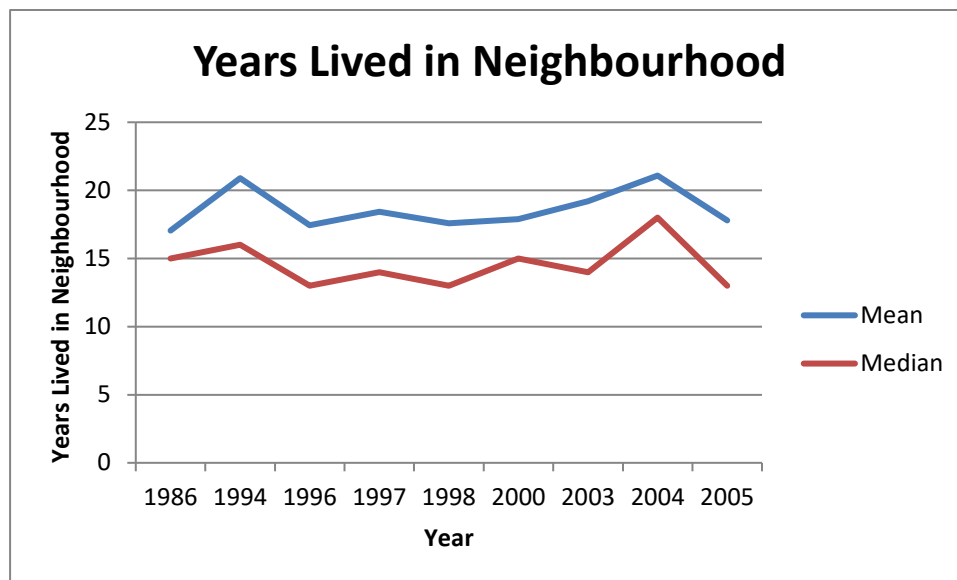
Source: BSA

The above chart shows a clear widening in the gap between those who believe “*Most people can be trusted*” and those who feel that you “*Can’t be too careful when dealing with other people*”, with the percentage subscribing to the latter growing. This aligns strongly with the findings of Hall (1999) who showed that over the given period, social trust as measured by an individual’s inclination to generally trust other citizens, has declined and has done so in all cohorts considered. Hall further observes that as levels of trust among members of the inter-war generation have declined (from 61 per cent in 1959 to 46 per cent in 1990), more or less in line with the general trend, this seems to be at least as much a period effect as a generational one. However, one cannot discount the possibility that growing up in a lower-trust period will leave its mark on the younger generations, which would thus create more profound findings here.

Second it is necessary to show that there is increased geographical mobility in Britain, where people no longer live in one place for their whole lives or even necessarily a substantial part of it but instead are more inclined to move around the country. This is more difficult to

statistically prove with the data and thus show clearly. From the below chart it is observable that there has actually been relatively little change, however the data has limitations in the fact that it only continues up to 2005.

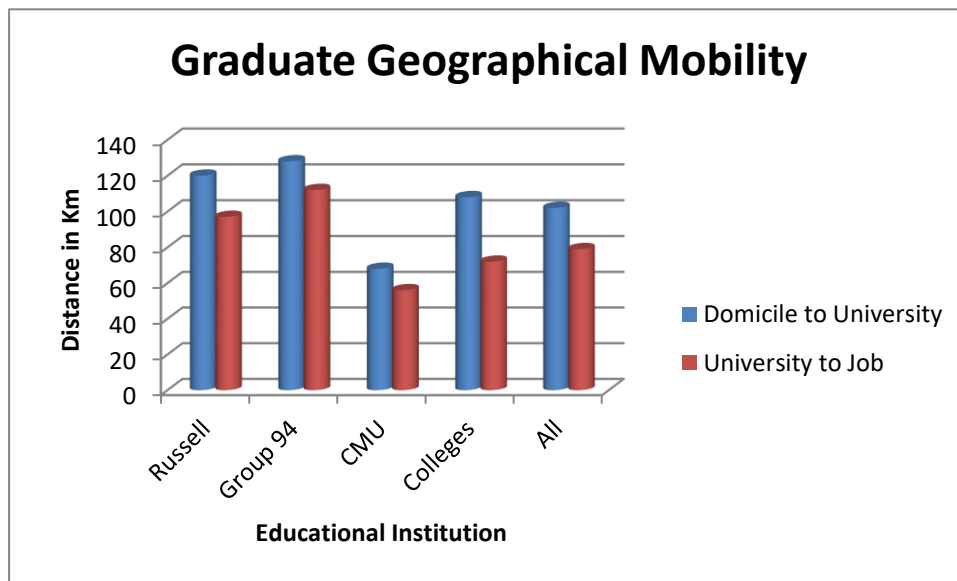
Chart 4



Source: BSA

However Chart 5 from Faggian and McCann (2009) provides much more support for this idea and shows that graduates both from British universities as well as lower levels of educational institutions are extremely geographically mobile, both firstly in terms of attending their educational institute of choice and then secondly once they have graduated and are in search of work. Moreover, these two movements are highly correlated (Faggian *et al.* 2007a, b). As such, most students in Great Britain do *not* enter into employment in the same local area (defined as a 15 km radius) as the university they attend. With the number of graduates and general educational attainment shown to be in the increase throughout Britain, this trend of geographical mobility is strong and only likely to persist well into the future as people both search for the best education for their individual needs, whether that be academic, practical or sporting, for example as well as by a job after that.

Chart 5



Source: *Universities, Agglomerations and Graduate Human Capital Mobility*, Faggian and McCann, 2009

Analysis:

Overall, these results offer a mixed picture in terms of Social Capital's ability to explain the twinned phenomena of declining electoral turnout at British General Elections with an increase in less traditional or non-institutionalised means of participation, such as signing a petition or attending a demonstration. Trust has been shown to be significant across all three categories of whether they voted in the last General Election, an individual's view on voting and whether they have engaged in other forms of political participation. This in itself offers a mixed picture whereby these results can explain the declining trends in voting, through the former two results, however it goes directly against what has been seen in Britain regarding other forms of political participation with the latter. Equally, the results produced provide less than conclusive evidence on the other measure of Social Capital, used in this study, in terms of the length of time an individual has lived in their neighbourhood, where a positive

significant effect was only found on voting and participation in politics through alternative means although statistically insignificant on views on voting. From these results both voting and other forms of participation should fall. Following this, the results are only faintly impacted once the full Social Capital model is introduced. While the results regarding voting remain unchanged, whereby both variables have a positive association with it, it is not possible to say the same for other forms of political participation. In this case, while the effect of trust remains relatively similar to when measured individually, the length of time that someone has lived in their given neighbourhood becomes insignificant and thus suggests that Social Capital's explanatory value may be more limited than it originally appeared.

Clearly the applicability of these results can only be accepted and therefore used for their explanatory value provided it is taken that there has in fact been a noticeable and influential decline in Social Capital as measured by the variables chosen in this study of trust and the length of time that an individual has lived in their neighbourhood respectively. This requires following a similar line of thought to that of Putnam as regards the US rather than Hall's (1999), potentially outdated, view that Britain has not experienced a similar decline.

Obviously, the degree to which this is accepted is crucial to the degree which the theory is applicable to explaining the trends experienced in political participation and in turn then shaping the future of participation in Britain depending on the view of this. This comes in two distinct parts. First is that the measures used in this study fairly represent Social Capital and can be used to show the trends within it. Given Social Capital is a contested concept this is always going to have its limitations however due to the broadly accepted nature of the variables chosen this should be widely accepted as creating a version of Social Capital even if this is not a conception which one particularly subscribes to. Second, however, is the nature of these trends and the level to which it is taken that these are both experiencing a clear downward trend. Without these clear trends, regardless of the relationship between the

variables chosen to measure Social Capital and political participation in the form of both voting as well as less traditional means such as attending a demonstration, would have absolutely no explanatory value as the trends would not align. It would not be possible to use Social Capital as an explanation of these trends should there not have been a clear downward trend observed in it.

Once the measurement and trends of Social Capital have been accepted, it is now necessary to interpret these results in order to link them back to the theory of Social Capital detailed above and then from this to determine whether or not the theory offers an adequate explanation for the current phenomena and trends in British politics where the way in which people engage is changing from the traditional method of voting at the ballot box to less traditional forms such as joining an activist group or partaking in a demonstration, which often sit outside of the political system.

Before discussing the results further however, it is important to clarify that this thesis will be working with the assumption that Putnam was correct in the sense of interpersonal and societal trust creating networks and aiding civic engagement such as voting. This is due to the convincing argument forwarded by Kreps et al. (1982), Axelrod (1984) and Camerer and Thaler (1995) in terms of a Game Theoretic justification. A conception such as Putnam's has a very solid grounding in economic theory and is clearly applicable to the political sphere in this sense of civic life. Once it has been accepted that a relationship between the variables, of trust and networks and political participation exists with a strong theoretical grounding, it then in turn becomes possible to evaluate the applicability of Putnam's Social Capital to the current trends in British political life. Again, without this it would be impossible to properly analyse and evaluate the relevance of Social Capital to what Britain has experienced in recent times.

The original hypothesis forwarded by Putnam, and the premise of Hypothesis 1 in this thesis, was that a decline in Social Capital would have negative consequences for all forms of civic participation including both the traditional means of voting in the General Election as well as other forms of political engagement such as signing a petition. From the results above there is strong evidence to support Putnam's claim, especially when the variables are considered independently. Where the variable used to measure trust proved to be highly statistically significant and positive for both whether someone voted in the last General Election and their views on voting as well as whether they had engaged in other forms of political participation, there was a little less support as regards the length of time someone had lived in their neighbourhood. While this showed to be significant on whether someone had actually voted in the last General Election it proved to be insignificant on an individual's view on voting between the three categories of *"No point in voting"*, *"Only vote when you care who wins"* and *"It is everyone's duty to vote"*. These results therefore offer support to Putnam's claims that both increased trust and a longer length of time lived in a neighbourhood, or rather an increase in Social Capital, will increase the chances that someone voted even if it doesn't necessarily affect their views on voting, with these effects tending to remain consistent across each set of controls. This support for Putnam's theory is then furthered by the fact that both the length of time someone has lived in their given neighbourhood as well as the degree to which someone believes other people in society to be trustworthy, have a statistically significant positive effect on whether an individual has engaged in other forms of political participation. Again, both of these effects retain their significance regardless of any set of controls which were applied to the relationship. As such, given these results, it is possible to offer broad support to Putnam's conception of Social Capital where a decline in it will in turn result in a decline in political participation, which will be observable across the board in terms of civic life. The decline will affect both voting turnout and other forms of

participation, as part of Putnam's broad conception of Social Capitals power to impact civic life.

However, it is now essential that this thesis turns to consider Social Capital as a whole theory, rather than just on the basis of the individual variables as has been done thus far in order to understand its broader impact as well as the driving forces within it. While combining the two variables in order to create a complete Social Capital Theory has very little effect on an individual's view on voting, where trust remains significant and the length of time an individual has lived in their neighbourhood remains statistically insignificant, with the same being said of voting, where both retain the positive significance they originally had, the same cannot be said of other forms of participation. In this case, whereas previously both trust and the length of time someone had lived in their neighbourhood were shown to have a significant positive effect on an individual's engagement in forms of political participation other than voting, this now only applies to trust. The length of time that someone has lived in their given neighbourhood becomes statistically insignificant when the data is controlled in order to create a full Social Capital model. This happens both when the variable is measured independently on the smaller data set as well as when the two variables are combined in order to develop this complete model.

From this, the applicability of Social Capital to the current participation trends in Britain reduces slightly. While the effect of Social Capital upon voting remains unchanged, it is necessary to reduce the support previously given to its effect on other forms of participation and in turn equally reduce the level of support that can be given to Putnam's conception. Social Capital as a wider concept rather than just the individual components, can still explain the declining trend in electoral turnout but now offers less insight as regards other forms of participation where only trust retains its significance. In many senses though, this does not alter the interpretations given above in terms of Social Capital's ability to explain the current

trends in British political participation. However, as alluded to, this does reduce the support that one can give to Putnam's very broad conception of the impact of Social Capital on civic engagement. Whereas Putnam claims that a reduction in Social Capital would lead to a serious decline in all forms of civic engagement within society, including both voting and other, less traditional, forms of political participation, the full model results suggest only the former of these with a potential limited effect on the latter through certain components of the model. Hence, it is not possible to fully subscribe to Putnam's conception of Social Capital as it was before although his model is still the best represented by the results produced in this thesis and therefore the interpretation does not change in this sense. The results are most closely aligned with Putnam however as such they fail to fully explain the current trends in British participation.

Hence at this point while it may not be possible to fully support Putnam's conception of Social Capital due to his very broad conception with which it impacts every part of civic life and where it is almost the sole determinant of civic engagement and the strength of civic life, it is possible to offer a large amount of support to Hypothesis 1 and then subsequently look to it in order to discuss appropriate policy options. Such a high level of support for Putnam's conception of Social Capital does however mean that it lacks explanatory value as regards the trends that have been observed in Britain over recent decades due to its ability to only explain the decline in electoral turnout rather than both trends.

From these results it is however necessary to reject Hypothesis 2 and thus rebuff the claims of Jackman and Miller (1996) who almost fully reject the theory as having any influence or claim to explaining democratic performance. They are sceptical of the power of Social Capital to explain political processes, with particular critical focus on the cultural explanations that sit at the centre of the theory. The results produced here are relatively conclusive in support of Putnam's conception of Social Capital and its impact on political

engagement and participation. Equally these results fail to offer a great deal of evidence in support of Henn, Weinstein and Hodgkinson (2007) who claim that Social Capital only produces mixed results on political attitudes and certainly doesn't provide the holistic and complete explanation which Putnam forwards with Social Capital being the main driver behind democratic and civic performance. While it would not be correct to completely dismiss their thoughts here, as it is with Jackman and Miller (1996), it is also necessary to say that there is more support here for the thoughts of Putnam and his theory of Social Capital rather than that of Henn, Weinstein and Hodgkinson (2007), who sit somewhere between the opposites of Putnam and his contemporaries Jackman and Miller. The findings of Henn, Weinstein and Hodgkinson (2007) remain relevant however as their work focuses on the younger cohort and the way in which they choose to engage in politics and why this is the case. Hence, this thesis will later return to their findings in relation to the policy implications which they drew from them.

In terms of then moving to further assess Social Capital's applicability to explaining the phenomena experienced in British politics, the results can only partially explain these. As discussed above, both measures used prove to be positively significant on voting and therefore a decline in trust or a general fall in the length of time people choose to live in their neighbourhood should equally see a fall in voting turnout. This is the case both individually as well as when combined in a full Social Capital model. Hence, Social Capital, in this way can be used to explain the falling turnout at General Elections. As demonstrated above, over the last few decades Britain has seen the level to which people trust others fall as well as at the same time experiencing a change whereby people are now increasingly more flexible and willing to move, potentially for work, and therefore do not tend to live in the same communities for the length of time that was previously seen. This fall in Social Capital has in turn contributed to a fall in voting turnout at General Elections. However, when turning to

consider other forms of political participation the results do not offer quite the same level of insight into the current trends in Britain. Both trust and the length of time which someone has lived in their given neighbourhood have equally proven significantly positive on whether or not an individual has engaged in alternative forms of politics such as signing a petition or attending a protest when considered independently. However when combined only trust retains its significance. Therefore, as both of these measures of Social Capital decline, it would be expected that there would be an equally observable decline in the engagement in such political activities, even should this not be the case in the combined model. Obviously, this is exactly the opposite of the trends that have been observed and the ones which this thesis is looking to explain, where such types of participation are increasing in Britain. As such, the explanatory value of Social Capital, as broadly defined by Putnam, is relatively limited as it can only account for the fall in electoral turnout and not the other trend at hand. Therefore at this point it is necessary to reject Hypothesis 4 which stated Social Capital could explain the joint trends in British political participation.

Overall, the results detailed above offer some limited support for Social Capital, in terms of explaining the recent trends in British political participation, which through falling levels of trust as well as the reduced length of time people have lived in their neighbourhood has led to a decline in voter turnout, however unfortunately it fails to account for increased engagement in other forms of politics. The results are originally very much in line with the thoughts of Putnam and the effect he claimed that Social Capital has on civic life and the democratic performance of a country, with a broad ranging impact upon all forms of political participation and engagement in civic society more generally, although this reduces slightly when the full model is created. Therefore on this account, while it is not possible to claim that Social Capital and its decline can fully explain current trends, it is certainly possible to claim that it offers a partial explanation and can be used to aid our understanding of some of the

causes of these trends and in turn assist with policy implications that these results produce. As levels of trust fall, and the length of time that people have lived in their neighbourhood reduces it is likely that this will depress voting turnout even if the findings here are less insightful to the current participation trends outside of voting. As discussed, from this it is therefore necessary to reject the views of Jackman and Miller (1996) who claim that Social Capital has no basis in explaining democratic performance and political participation. It is equally necessary to reject the suggestions of Henn, Weinstein and Hodgkinson (2007), even if their findings that Social Capital produces only mixed results in explaining democratic performance can be aligned with to a certain extent particularly once the full model is introduced, rather than merely the individual components. From their results they concluded that these indicated the withdrawal from formal politics, in the form of voting decline, is more a result of a scepticism of the way the political system operates rather than apathy, with their research focusing primarily on young people and their perceived disengagement with politics. The results produced in this thesis would suggest that it is not possible to generalise this finding across all age groups and cohorts and instead confirms that their findings can only be applied to younger cohorts, hence at this stage Hypothesis 3 can be rejected. This does not detract however from the Electoral Commission and the Hansard Society's report (2006) stating that in the medium to long term there is a worry that civic orientated older generations will be replaced by a younger sceptical and election boycotting generation who choose to express their political views through other means. Across the board, it is observable that people are evidently becoming disenchanted with the traditional political set up and are instead choosing to engage in politics and express their opinions in other less traditional ways where this can at least in part be attributed to a decline in Social Capital, which here has been shown to explain the trend of falling electoral turnout.

Hypothesis 1 – Partial Support – An increase in Social Capital broadly increases political participation although this does not apply to every single relationship.

Hypothesis 2 – Rejected – Social Capital clearly has some level of impact on political participation even if Hypothesis 1 cannot be fully supported.

Hypothesis 3 – Rejected – Social Capital, broadly speaking, has a positive effect on political participation and thus it would be incorrect to claim mixed results in terms of both positive and negative effects.

Hypothesis 4 – Partial Support – While Social Capital, and its decline, can explain the decline in electoral turnout in Britain, it fails to offer any explanation for the increase in alternative forms of political engagement.

Hence, it is therefore necessary to draw upon these conclusions in order to form policies which succeed in expanding educational participation, reducing social class differences and social exclusion, regenerating neighbourhoods and communities, strengthening local community networks and promoting social cohesion, and fostering volunteering and self help, may contribute in helping at least limit the drift towards further political disengagement as regards voting as suggested by Henn, Weinstein and Hodgkinson (2007). Such policies would help increase Social Capital and in turn increase electoral turnout or at least limit the fall it is currently experiencing as well as encouraging other forms of political participation that in part shape a healthy democracy in the modern world. This finding is very much in line with that of other academics who have argued that where Social Capital can be shaped, developed and mobilised by social policy, this may have positive consequences both in terms of civic engagement and better government (Hall, 1999; Halpren, 1999; Newton, 1999b; Lowndes & Wilson, 2001). The finer details as to how is actually best to increase the level of Social Capital in Britain remains more open to debate and would require significant research

in order to ensure its success and in turn broadly increase levels of political participation which includes both voting as well as other forms of engagement. The success of this policy development would in a large part depend upon the primary focus of it and whether it was aiming to increase electoral turnout, other forms of participation or both in tandem with one another. Having said this, given increasing Social Capital has been shown to have a positive effect on both voting turnout as well as other forms of participation, to a certain extent any policy which is shown to increase Social Capital should theoretically aid in the increase of both, even if originally looking to target either one of the two more specifically. Finally, as was seen in the discrepancies between Hall (1999) and Putnam's view of the decline in Social Capital within their respective countries of the UK and the US, it is necessary to note that it is not possible to generalise the decline or impact of Social Capital found in this thesis as regards Britain. Other nations may well have not experienced this same decline and nor could it even be claimed that Social Capital has the same influence in any given nation, as it has been shown to have here in Britain as regards political participation.

Cognitive Mobility:

This chapter will assess the ability of Cognitive Mobility Theory in explaining the phenomena observed in British politics as regards participation throughout recent history, in terms of declining voter turnout as well as a rise in other forms of engagement. It will follow an identical structure to the previous chapter as regards Social Capital by first operationalising the theory before considering the results and appropriate trends before finally concluding as regards the theory's explanatory value.

As discussed above there is a range of views as to whether educational attainment has an impact on both electoral turnout as well as other forms of political participation. However, for a number of reasons this study will use education as a proxy for cognitive ability. Increased levels of education reduces both the cognitive and material costs of voting as well as developing the necessary cognitive skills that help voters to process political information such as deciphering political rhetoric and selecting the appropriate candidate and party (Denny & Doyle, 2008). Further to this, education has the potential to instil a sense of civic duty by fostering democratic values and beliefs, in addition to encouraging participation in socially orientated activities (Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980). Finally, education has been shown to provide individuals with the necessary skills to deal with the bureaucracy of voting (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993) as well as potentially increasing political interest (Verba, Scholzman & Brady, 1995). The combination of these factors means it is evident that education serves to reduce the costs of voting, which aligns with Dalton's conception of Cognitive Mobilisation and hence education will be the first set of regressions run in this section. To show that higher educational attainment is statistically significant in political participation would strongly support the theory of Cognitive Mobility. This variable will be split into seven distinct categories progressing through from no educational qualifications to a degree level. In order to make this measure more politically orientated the second variable

will consist of to what extent an individual agrees with the statement “*Government is too complicated for people like me to understand*” where 1 represents strongly agreeing with this statement whereas 10 would show strong disagreement. While the first variable offers a general over view on education, the second provides a more localised picture of whether people feel more able to understand politics, rather than purely an academic viewpoint.

Finally, whether an individual supports a political party or not will be measured against the three variables of political participation. Given party membership has fallen relatively dramatically in Britain any effect here would equally provide support for the theory. This variable has been included on the basis of Dalton’s claim that as individuals become better educated their need for party attachment is reduced as they have the ability to understand the issues at hand and therefore make political decisions independently. As such with increased levels of education, political party attachment and membership should decline. In summary, each of the three variables detailed above will be considered as regards their effect on the three measures of political engagement used in this thesis of whether they actually voted in the last General election, an individual’s view on voting and finally whether they have taken part in alternative, less traditional forms of political participation.

Results:

It is now possible to progress to detail the aforementioned regression tables produced in order to assess the applicability of Cognitive Mobility in explaining the current phenomena of participation in British politics. This will begin with tables where the three variables of Highest Educational Qualification, Government Too Complicated and whether or not an individual Supports a Political Party have been tested independently for the effect they have on voting, views on voting as well as other forms of political participation. However,

following this, the three measures will be combined in order to create a full Cognitive Mobility model and from this it will be possible to assess whether the variables are significant both independently as well as when combined in this full model and hence whether Cognitive Mobility is driving these effects rather than merely one or two of the variables chosen by which to measure it.

From the first six tables it is clearly observable that there is a very consistent and strong positive association between each of these three measures of Cognitive Mobility on an individual's view on voting. This effect is present between believing that there is "*No point in voting*" compared to both believing that "*People should only vote when they care who wins*" and that "*It is everyone's duty to vote*" respectively.

Table 13 - Views on Voting between "No Point in Voting" and "People Should Only Vote When They Care Who Wins"

Variable				
Highest Educational Qualification	0.160*** (0.013)	0.188*** (0.015)	0.153*** (0.015)	0.158*** (0.016)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	No	No	Yes
Personal	No	Yes	No	Yes
Economic and Political	No	No	Yes	Yes
N	0.057	0.067	0.086	0.089
Nagelkerke Pseudo R²	6468	6468	6468	6468

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

Table 14 - Views on Voting between “No Point in Voting” and “It is Everyone’s Duty to Vote”

Variable				
Highest Educational Qualification	0.170***	0.339***	0.226***	0.289***
	(0.011)	(0.014)	(0.013)	(0.015)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	No	No	Yes
Personal	No	Yes	No	Yes
Economic and Political	No	No	Yes	Yes
N	0.049	0.182	0.210	0.255
Nagelkerke Pseudo R²	13793	13793	13793	13793

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

The above two tables confirm this positive association between an individual’s Highest Educational Qualification and their view on voting whereby a higher educational qualification signals that an individual is more likely to subscribe to the views that “*People should only vote when they care who wins*” and “*It is everyone’s duty to vote*” respectively compared to the reference category of believing there to be “*No point in voting*”. The effect is mildly reduced once the Political and Economic controls are introduced however the effect remains relatively stable throughout. Hence education drives people towards the view that voting is a duty which is very much in line with the thoughts of Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980) who claim that it has the potential to instil a sense of civic duty by fostering democratic values and beliefs.

The next set of tables regarding to what extent an individual considers government to be too complicated shows a similar trend. Again there is a statistically significant relationship between this variable and the view of voting outlined above. Equally present here is the minor impact of introducing the Political and Economic controls, however again this effect retains its significance and is relatively stable.

Table 15 - Views on Voting between “No Point in Voting” and “People Should Only Vote When They Care Who Wins”

Variable				
Government Too Complicated	0.284*** (0.037)	0.295*** (0.039)	0.227*** (0.039)	0.242*** (0.040)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	No	No	Yes
Personal	No	Yes	No	Yes
Economic and Political	No	No	Yes	Yes
Nagelkerke Pseudo R²	0.055	0.066	0.121	0.131
N	3532	3532	3532	3532

Table 16 - Views on Voting between “No Point in Voting” and “Everyone’s’s Duty to Vote”

Variable				
Government Too Complicated	0.454*** (0.034)	0.507*** (0.035)	0.335*** (0.036)	0.374*** (0.037)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	No	No	Yes
Personal	No	Yes	No	Yes
Economic and Political	No	No	Yes	Yes
N	0.064	0.158	0.236	0.269
Nagelkerke Pseudo R²	7923	7923	7923	7923

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

Finally as regards Cognitive Mobility’s impact on an individual’s view on voting is whether or not they support a political party as it detailed in Tables 17 and 18. This, as with the two previous measures, shows a positive effect whereby a supporter of a political party is more likely to subscribe to either believing “*People should only vote when they care who wins*” or

“It is everyone’s duty to vote” as opposed to the reference category which states there is *“No point in voting”*.

Table 17 - Views on Voting between “No Point in Voting” and “People Should Only Vote When They Care Who Wins”

Variable				
Support Political Party	1.151*** (0.079)	1.208*** (0.079)	1.188*** (0.078)	1.202*** (0.082)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	No	No	Yes
Personal	No	Yes	No	Yes
Economic and Political	No	No	Yes	Yes
N	0.08	0.089	0.103	0.104
Nagelkerke Pseudo R²	6265	6265	6265	6265

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

Table 18 - Views on Voting between “No Point in Voting” and “It is Everyone’s Duty to Vote”

Variable				
Support Political Party	2.124*** (0.073)	1.950*** (0.072)	2.053*** (0.072)	1.959*** (0.075)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	No	No	Yes
Personal	No	Yes	No	Yes
Economic and Political	No	No	Yes	Yes
N	0.174	0.217	0.220	0.247
Nagelkerke Pseudo R²	13391	13391	13391	13391

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

Next, this thesis moves to consider the effect of Cognitive Mobility upon whether or not someone actually chose to vote in the last General Election and again these results confirm

the positive effect of Cognitive Mobilisation upon electoral turnout. Each of the three measures clearly demonstrates that an increase in Cognitive Mobility, as measured by these chosen variables, increases an individuals propensity to vote at a General Election.

Table 19 - Voted

Variable				
Highest Educational Qualification	0.052*** (0.008)	0.196*** (0.010)	0.084*** (0.010)	0.148*** (0.010)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	No	No	Yes
Personal	No	Yes	No	Yes
Economic and Political	No	No	Yes	Yes
N	0.021	0.177	0.154	0.219
Nagelkerke Pseudo R²	17667	17667	17667	17667

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

Table 20 - Voted

Variable				
Government Too Complicated	0.274*** (0.023)	0.321*** (0.024)	0.210*** (0.025)	0.220*** (0.026)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	No	No	Yes
Personal	No	Yes	No	Yes
Economic and Political	No	No	Yes	Yes
N	0.035	0.166	0.219	0.262
Nagelkerke Pseudo R²	9639	9639	9639	9639

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

Table 21 - Voted

Variable				
Support Political Party	1.631*** (0.043)	1.426*** (0.044)	1.530*** (0.044)	1.421*** (0.044)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	No	No	Yes
Personal	No	Yes	No	Yes
Economic and Political	No	No	Yes	Yes
N	0.154	0.230	0.203	0.250
Nagelkerke Pseudo R²	18001	18001	18001	18001
***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05				

As would be expected, Table 21 shows that supporting a political party has the largest positive effect on whether someone voted, however each of the other two effects, in the tables directly above, is equally highly significant and of a positive nature. In each case, the effect remains relatively constant regardless of any set of controls which is applied to the association. Specifically as regards an individual's highest educational qualification, it can be observed that once the Personal set of controls is in place the magnitude of the effect actually increases almost four fold suggesting that these factors actually mask the size effect to some extent.

Finally in this section, it is necessary to consider the effect of each variable on other forms of political participation individually. Thus, each of the following three tables demonstrates the positive effect of Cognitive Mobilisation upon forms of political participation other than through the traditional means of voting. In this case however, in contrast to that of voting, it is education rather than supporting a political party which provides the largest effect.

Table 22 - Other Political Participation

Variable				
Highest Educational Qualification	0.204***	0.232**	0.206***	0.206***
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.009)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	No	No	Yes
Personal	No	Yes	No	Yes
Economic and Political	No	No	Yes	Yes
N	0.152	0.158	0.151	0.163
Nagelkerke Pseudo R²	15949	15949	15949	15949

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

Table 23 - Other Political Participation

Variable				
Support a Political Party	0.331***	0.382***	0.358***	0.368***
	(0.030)	(0.032)	(0.031)	(0.032)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	No	No	Yes
Personal	No	Yes	No	Yes
Economic and Political	No	No	Yes	Yes
N	0.125	0.134	0.140	0.146
Nagelkerke Pseudo R²	19950	19950	19950	19950

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

Table 24 - Other Political Participation

Variable				
Government Too Complicated	0.331***	0.333***	0.303***	0.308***
	(0.016)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	No	No	Yes
Personal	No	Yes	No	Yes
Economic and Political	No	No	Yes	Yes
N	0.048	0.058	0.058	0.069
Nagelkerke Pseudo R²	13122	13122	13122	13122

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

Each of the three effects above remains extremely stable despite any set of controls which may be applied to the relationship thus clearly showing that these associations are not being driven by underlying factors and instead are present regardless of these.

From these tables it is very clear that each of the three variables chosen to measure Cognitive Mobility has a positive effect on each of an individual's view on voting away from believing there to be no point in doing so, whether someone actually voted at the last General Election and whether they have participation in other forms of political engagement.

Having assessed each Cognitive Mobility variable independently, it is now necessary to build a complete Cognitive Mobility model which incorporates all three of these in order to observe how they each interact with one another. It will equally be possible to confirm from this whether these relationships are driven by a broad Cognitive Mobility stimulus or alternatively whether such effects can be attributed to just a single factor. In a similar way to as with Social Capital, N will be kept consistent within each of these tables and hence may differ from the tables above when assessing each variable independently.

**Table 25 - Views on Voting between "No Point in Voting" and "People Should only
Vote When They Care Who Wins" Summary**

Variable				
Highest Educational Qualification	0.147***			0.113***
	(0.022)			(0.023)
Government Too Complicated		0.264***		0.195***
		(0.040)		(0.042)
Supports a Political Party			1.134***	1.079***
			(0.108)	(0.108)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Personal	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Economic and Political	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Nagelkerke Pseudo R²	0.083	0.082	0.113	0.135
N	3455	3455	3455	3455

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

Table 26 - Views on Voting between "It is Everyone's Duty To Vote" Summary

Variable				
Highest Educational Qualification	0.279***			0.229***
	(0.020)			(0.021)
Government Too Complicated		0.439***		0.270***
		(0.036)		(0.039)
Supports a Political Party			1.805***	1.714***
			(0.098)	(0.100)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Personal	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Economic and Political	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Nagelkerke Pseudo R²	0.199	0.189	0.248	0.291
N	7770	7770	7770	7770

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

Tables 25 and 26 confirm the previous findings that each of the variables has a positive association with an individual believing either that “*People should only vote when they care who wins*” or that “*It is everyone’s duty to vote*” as opposed to subscribing to the view of the reference category by which it is believed there is “*No point in voting*”. As such, it is possible to state that Cognitive Mobilisation is driving this association as opposed to just a single variable which forms part of the theory.

Table 27 - Voting Summary

Variable				
Highest Educational Qualification	0.180***			0.154***
	(0.017)			(0.017)
Government Too Complicated		0.249***		0.178***
		(0.029)		(0.031)
Supports a Political Party			1.484***	1.412***
			(0.074)	(0.075)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Personal	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Economic and Political	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Nagelkerke Pseudo R²	0.279	0.271	0.259	0.284
N	7258	7258	7258	7258

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

As was found with views on voting above, here it is equally observable that the positive effect of each variable on voting is part of a broader Cognitive Mobilisation agenda whereby each variable has a statistically significant positive effect and it is not possible to claim that any one is driving any other. The table similarly confirms the findings above in that supporting a political party is the largest single driving variable although as mentioned, it is now clear that this forms one part of a broader Cognitive Mobilisation movement.

Table 28 - Other Political Participation Summary

Variable				
Highest Educational Qualification	0.230***			0.194***
	(0.010)			(0.010)
Government Too Complicated		0.308***		0.201***
		(0.017)		(0.018)
Supports a Political Party			0.409***	0.314***
			(0.039)	(0.040)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Personal	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Economic and Political	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Nagelkerke Pseudo R²	0.090	0.068	0.047	0.110
N	12866	12866	12866	12866

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

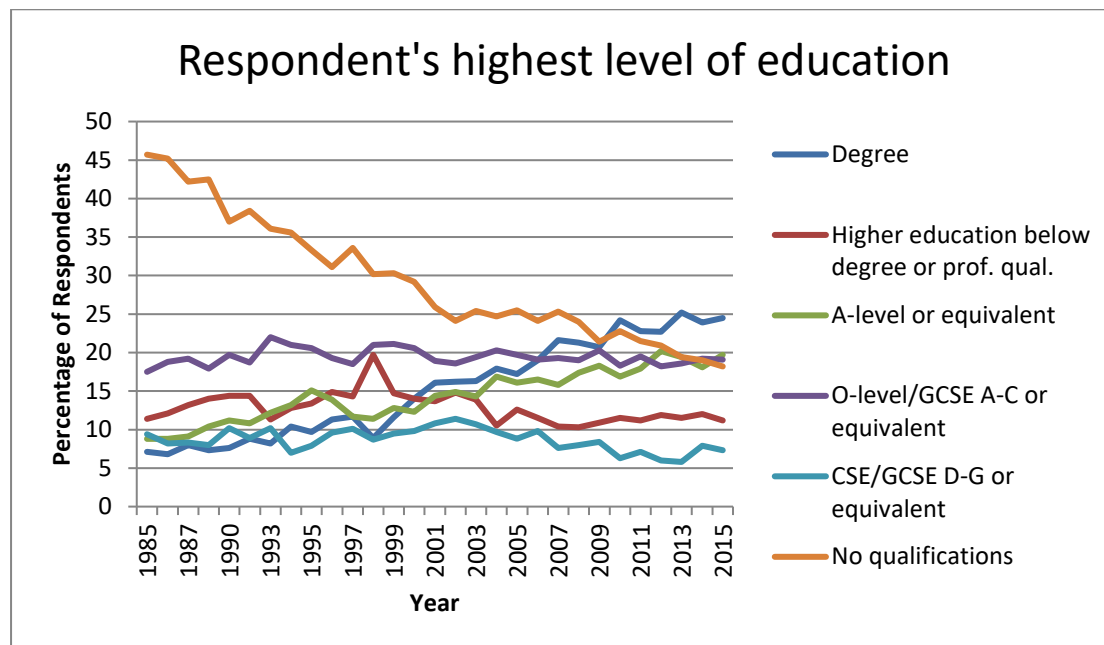
The final table demonstrates that the previously observed positive effect of each Cognitive Mobility variable as regards other forms of political engagement besides voting is indeed also part of a broader Cognitive Mobilisation movement. This means that as an individual becomes more intelligent this allows them to make political decisions more autonomously than was the case before, and as part of this people will chose to partake in other forms of political participation such as signing a petition or joining a protest group, rather than merely being restricted to voting at a General Election once every five years.

Trends:

Following the regression tables however it is now necessary to transparently demonstrate that each of the three variables chosen to measure Cognitive Mobilisation has in fact shown the suggested trend throughout the period of this study in order to be able to validly link these trends to those of political participation in Britain. This is much more straight forward than it potentially is with the variables chosen to measure the other two theories. First, educational

attainment has undoubtedly increased in Britain with almost every gauge of this increasing over the last few decades.

Chart 6

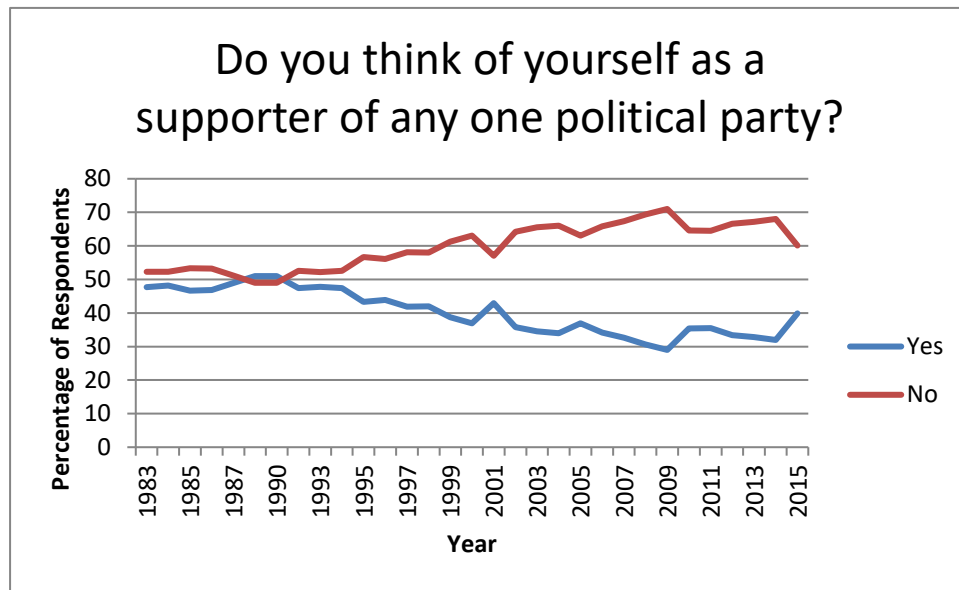


Source: *BSA*

This chart clearly demonstrates that the number of people who have no qualifications at all has fallen quite dramatically during this period, while it is equally observable that the number of people who achieve A Levels or a degree during the same period has increased steadily and continually. Together these trends show an increase in educational attainment.

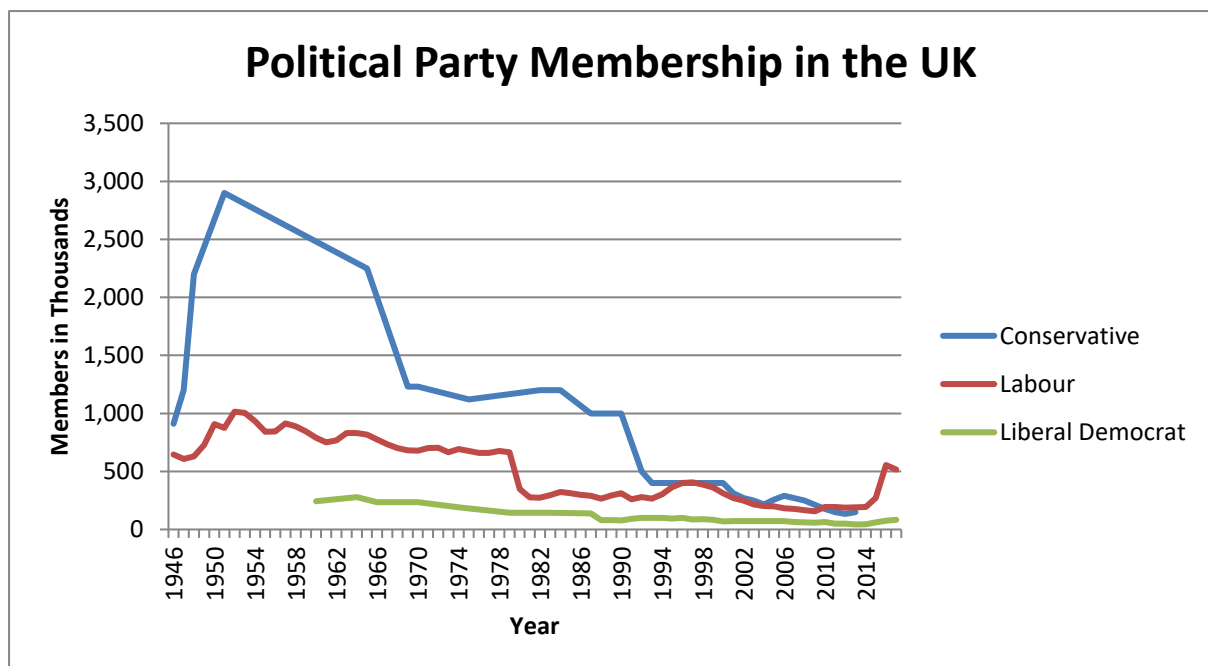
Equally, political party membership is extremely easy to chart where despite a recent surge in membership since 2015, largely driven by the Labour Party and their leadership elections, a steady decline is still clearly observable since the 1950s. The charts below clearly demonstrate this significant decline in party membership following a peak around the early 1950s. This is observable both generally, in Chart 7, as well as in each of the three major parties individually in Chart 8.

Chart 7:



Source: BSA

Chart 8

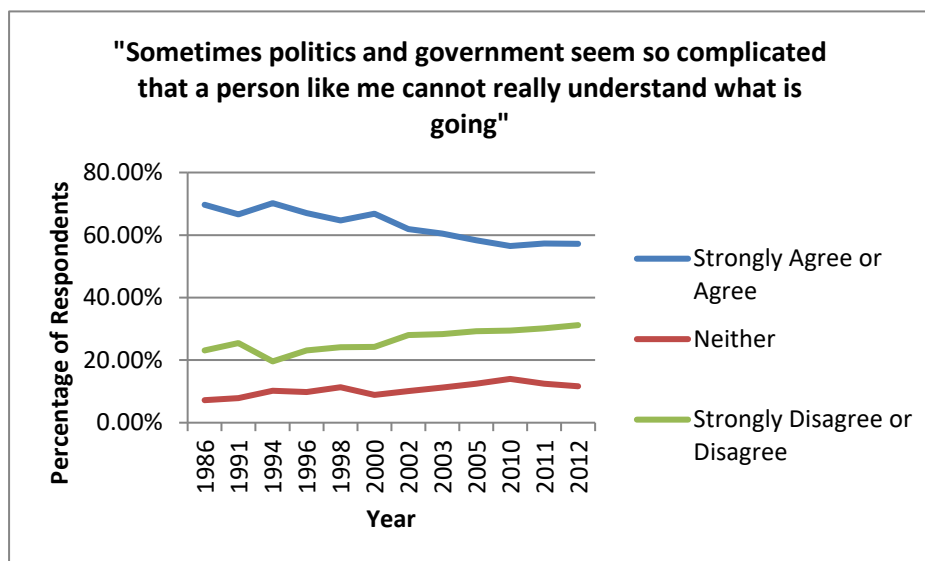


Source: *Membership of UK Political Parties, Keen and Apsotolova, March 2017*

The one variable which poses a minor problem is that of the extent to which an individual agrees with the statement that “*Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me cannot really understand what is going.*” as this is not factual, but rather

opinion based, however the trend remains clearly observable. The original five point scale from the BSA Survey has been condensed into a three point scale, purely for ease of analysis, and thus the chart below clearly demonstrates the trends in favour of increased cognitive mobilisation as regards politics. The number of respondents who either strongly agree or agree with this statement has fallen from 70% to only 57% whereas the opposite is observable as regards the number of respondents who strongly disagree or disagree with the statement. In this case the percentage of respondents has increased from 23% to over 31%. These results only serve to complement the other findings regarding increased cognitive mobilisation in Britain, with the benefit of this result being its specific politics orientated nature.

Chart 9



Source: BSA

Analysis:

To sum up, these results, as a whole, provide a very conclusive picture where an increase in Cognitive Mobility is likely to lead to an increase in political participation both in terms voting as well as through other means. Thus originally Cognitive Mobility Theory seems to

lack much explanatory value in terms of the recent trends in British political participation due to the contradictory findings regarding voting, and would sit in line with Hypothesis 5 which states that Cognitive Mobilisation would increase participation overall. However once the relative size of the effects are considered the theory then offers a great deal of insight. First, the more educated an individual is, the more likely it is that they will be active in the political sphere whether that is in terms of the traditional means of voting through the ballot box or by more unconventional means such as joining a protest group or attending a demonstration. Both the increase in education as well as the reduction in people agreeing with the statement *“Government is too complicated for people like me to understand”* represent the same trend of greater political understanding and therefore it is expected a general increase in political activity of all kinds will be observable in Britain. As such these results are in line with the work of Pattie and Johnston (2001) who show there is an effect of education on voting in Britain as opposed to the likes of Dalton (2002), Wattenburg (2002) and Larcinese (2002) who all found there to be only a low correlation between the two compared to the very strong association found here. As would be expected political party membership equally has a very strong positive effect on all forms of political participation. Thus, all measures of Cognitive Mobility as well as the combined model have a positive association with all forms of political participation, including voting. Hence, at this early stage, it is possible to reject Hypothesis 6 which states Cognitive Mobilisation has no effect on political participation.

However, as mentioned, the size of these effects differ and therefore it is possible to apply these findings to the British case. In terms of alternative forms of participation the positive effect of education is far larger than that of supporting a political party. Thus, while the fall in party membership is expected to have the effect of reducing such forms of participation, the larger positive effect of increased education means that overall such participation would be expected to rise. On the other hand, as regards voting, the reverse can be observed whereby

the size of the positive effect of supporting a political party has on voting is much larger than that of the positive association between education and voting. Education has a positive relationship on both voting as well as an individual's view on voting and therefore this effect is likely to offset some of the fall in electoral turnout caused by the larger effect of the fall in party membership. On this account, voting turnout should be falling due to the clear decline of political party members whereas other means of participation such as signing petitions, attending demonstrations or joining activist groups should all be on the rise, which largely equates with the trends we are currently experiencing in Britain.

Hence with these results it is possible to explain the rise in other, non traditional forms of political participation as well as understand the causes for the decline in voting turnout and confirm Hypothesis 7. Although it would be incorrect to claim that both of these trends could be fully understood based purely on Cognitive Mobility Theory, it does offer a significant amount of insight to the current trends in Britain. Thus it is possible to reject the thoughts of Albright (2009) who claims that Cognitive Mobility is not consistent with the current trends of dealignment in British politics whereby he states that Cognitive Mobility actually increases the likelihood that a respondent expresses an attachment to a particular party, with this positive relationship unchanged across different cohorts. Although it is possible to offer some support to Hypothesis 5 whereby overall political participation will increase in line with an increase in Cognitive Mobilisation, it fails to offer a fuller insight into the trends observed in Britain where declining electoral turnout needs to be accounted for and explained appropriately. As such it is instead possible to offer a considerable amount of support to Hypothesis 7, based on the magnitude of each of the effects measured and the current trends, which posits that Cognitive Mobility has led to citizens wishing to be involved in the political sphere more than once every five years by voting at the ballot box and will choose alternatively to engage in a range of politics much broader than this where they can tailor

their interest very specifically. In turn, voter turnout will decline because as a political act this has become less potent in expressing ones political viewpoint successfully whereas other forms of political engagement will increase as the electorate redefine how they wish to participate. The consequences of these results and what this means for the explanatory value of Cognitive Mobility Theory will be discussed in greater detail below as regards these two trends before in turn briefly considering any policy implications that these findings create.

As this thesis has slightly adapted the theory in order to make it more relevant to the current trends, it is first important to note that Cognitive Mobility does not necessarily originally set out to explain the latter trend, in terms of declining electoral turnout, but rather suggests evolving voting habits. As Dalton argued, mass level characteristics in Britain have changed to such a degree that voters now approach elections in a much more precarious and cautious manner, no longer merely voting for a party whom they support, almost blindly, due to partisan attachment, as was previously believed to be the case, both in Britain as well as across most modern democracies. As shown above through the fall in political party membership, Britain has moved away from a time where the electorate required partisan attachments in order to make voting decisions such as was suggested by the likes of Shivley (1979) as well as Borre & Katz (1973) and rather the country is now made up to a greater degree of the type of sophisticated voter discussed by Sniderman, Brody & Tetlock (1991). Despite the aforementioned recent surge of party membership, mainly driven by the Labour Party, the decline since the 1950s is still noticeably large and the effects of this have been experienced in the way the electorate now chooses to vote. While this shift suggested by Dalton as regards political alignment to a particular party is clearly influential, it far from necessitates a significant change in electoral turnout. The fact that voters now make a much more pragmatic decision in terms of vote choice does not necessarily equate with falling turnout. The same voters who previously voted in line with their partisan attachments are

now able to assess the various sources of political information available to them and make an informed choice on this. However this thesis hypothesises that increased Cognitive Mobilisation will reduce the attractiveness of voting relative to other forms of participation and therefore on the account of Cognitive Mobility used in this thesis the theory therefore has significant explanatory value as regards voting. The fall in party membership has pushed voter turnout downwards although this decline has then in part being reduced by the positive effect of increased education on electoral turnout, as alluded to by Dalton.

However it is important to question what the driving variable is behind the relationship between supporting a political party and voting is. While it has been assumed here that a supporter of a particular party is more likely to vote, it is possible to look at this relationship in the reverse where people who would vote regardless of whether or not they were party member choose to become one because of the very fact that they vote and are broadly interested and engaged in politics. It is not possible to confirm this either way and thus define the driving factor at hand. Should it be correctly assumed that when someone joins a political party they are then more likely to vote, this would be largely supportive of Cognitive Mobility Theory and its ability to explain the current trends in Britain, as discussed above, where falling party membership has equally seen a decline in voter turnout. However, on the other hand, if it is taken that people who join a political party were more inclined to vote whether they were a member or not and that becoming a member does not suddenly increase their propensity to vote, it would be far less supportive of the Cognitive Mobility lines of thought, and bring into question the explanatory value of Cognitive Mobility as regards the currently observed voting trends. Given the strong results in favour of Cognitive Mobility's explanatory value this theoretical issue poses the largest problem for these results.

However, it is reasonable to assume that this issue is far more relevant to participation in the form of voting than in the case of other forms of engagement, although it is still worthy of

note. Political parties sit at the very heart of voting and the electoral system and are thus inherently interconnected with the act of voting whereas the same does not apply in the same manner to other forms of political participation.

Next, moving to consider voting to other forms of political participation, the results here equally offer significant insight into the increase in these other forms of political participation and very much fall in line with Inglehart's (1977) findings that people are now placing greater value upon self expression where their rising level of cognitive skills enable them to participate in politics at a higher level and engage in forms of political participation other than voting. As such they are looking to shape specific political decisions and influence certain causes rather than entrusting these issues to skilled minorities in the form of elected politicians in Westminster. This increased cognitive ability has two clear and distinct benefits from the perspective of the voter. First, greater cognitive ability allows people to engage in politics in a much more continuous way whereby they can be constantly involved in the political sphere on a day to day level rather than only having the opportunity to engage in politics once every five years in the General Election. In the fast moving and ever changing political world of today this is of great attraction to an individual who is interested in politics more broadly as well as those who have strong views on a smaller number of issues on which they choose to focus their attention. Second, now that voters are more able to both access and understand political information they are in turn able to then compare their views on each issue to that of the policy platforms taken by each of the political parties offered on the ballot paper. While it is reasonable to accept that most individuals would be able to find a party that they hold considerable common ground with, it is unlikely that even those who still chose to openly align with a particular party could say they agree with each and every position taken by their party on the issues of the day. As such, the greater cognitive ability held by the electorate allows them to tailor their engagement very specifically to the positions they hold

rather than only having the opportunity to vote for a party with whom they broadly agree on policy platforms. For example, while an individual may broadly agree with the views of any one of the three major political parties in the Conservatives, Labour or the Liberal Democrats they may equally feel that none offer an appropriate environmental policy which aligns with their views. In this case they could vote for their party of choice at the General Election, then having made that decision and following their assessment of the information available to them lobby the government on environmental issues through more demanding and less traditional means of participation such as joining a protest group of the likes of Greenpeace, regardless of which party wins the election. This could obviously be done through many different political channels, a range of which have been mentioned throughout this thesis. Joining an influential group such as Greenpeace would likely offer the chance to engage in many different forms of participation each under their umbrella through the campaigns they run. In the media focused world which has developed across modern democracies, it is possible to put constant pressure on political organisations, groups and individuals while building huge levels of support and momentum in a very short space of time. This is, in part, how the modern voters of today are choosing to engage in politics and express their views and opinions. Obviously the example here of an environmental concern, is just that and can thus be applied to an almost all inclusive range of issues.

However, it is noteworthy here that this type of engagement is potentially more relevant to Britain than many other modern democracies such as the US for example, where voters have the option to split their ticket and vote for a number of different parties or candidates at elections. For example, in the US Presidential Election, as well as voting for the President, voters will also be casting ballots for the state Senator and House Representative as well as a host of other local offices. As such it is possible to tailor ones political support much more

easily and narrowly through the ballot box than is potentially possible in the UK and therefore the need to engage in other forms of participation may well not be as prevalent.

Before concluding, it is necessary to refer back to Tables 25-28 in order to confirm that while these effects each had a positive association independently and suggested a Cognitive Mobility notion there is equally a broader relationship between Cognitive Mobility as a complete theory and political participation through both voting at the ballot box as well as less traditional forms of engagement such as attending a protest on a specific issue. This is important as it is this set of results which confirms the applicability of the Cognitive Mobility theory rather than just providing analysis of the individual components the theory is composed of. Each of the three variables form this Cognitive Mobilisation movement and from the results it cannot be claimed than any single one is being driven by one of the other two and hence the theory stands up. Here it is good to note however that due to the set of Political and Economic controls that were applied to the variables when tested independently, supporting a political party was controlled for on both of an individual's highest educational qualification and well as to the extent to which someone agrees or disagrees with the statement "*Government is too complicated for people like me to understand*". Thus it had already been confirmed, prior to this that each of these two variables works independently of supporting a political party and this in turn offered early support to the theory of Cognitive Mobility. As such, these additional findings further support the results discussed above and that a broad Cognitive Mobility line of thought goes a long way to explaining the current trends in British political participation and thus the interpretations previously retain their validity, and the confirmation of Hypothesis 7.

Overall, the above results show that Cognitive Mobility Theory goes a long way to explaining the phenomena that has been experienced across Britain in recent decades. While the fall in party membership has had a negative impact upon voting turnout, this has been

partly offset by the increase in education across the country, due to a host of educational reforms, which has a positive effect on propensity to vote. Those individuals whom are now choosing not to automatically vote for the party with whom they were previously aligned to are not necessarily refraining from voting but rather just making their voting choice independently and hence offsetting this fall; turnout has fallen but not as much as would be the case were it not for the increase in education. A similar picture can be observed as regards other forms of political participation where both increased education as well as disagreeing with the statement “*Government is too complicated for people like me to understand*” have a significant positive effect on whether an individual has engaged in other forms of political participation. However, supporting a political party equally has this same positive effect and as membership has declined substantially it would be expected that these alternative forms of participation would similarly decline. As discussed however, the relative size of the two effects reverses to whereby the positive effect of education is much larger than this and therefore participation overall would still be expected to increase. There has been an increase in other forms of political participation due to increased education and thus political knowledge and understanding however this increase is not as big as it may have been as the decline in political party support has pushed down such engagement.

Hypothesis 5 – Partially supported – Cognitive Mobility is found to have a positive association with all forms of political participation originally and before the trends are fully considered as well as the size of the effects

Hypothesis 6 – Rejected – It is clear that Cognitive Mobility has an impact on all forms of political participation.

Hypothesis 7 – Supported – Once the size of the different effects are considered, Cognitive Mobility has the ability to explain both trends

It is apparent that these results produce a very favourable picture in terms of explaining the two phenomena at hand. It would be wrong to conclude or argue that Cognitive Mobility Theory as conceived in this thesis could fully or holistically explain the two twinned trends of falling electoral turnout with increased engagement in other forms of political participation, however it provides very strong and convincing evidence on both counts and thus should be seriously considered and used in policy engagement when considering all forms of political participation. This is the case both when the components of the theory are considered independently as well as when the theory is considered as a whole.

In light of this support for Cognitive Mobility, these results in turn point towards certain policy implications, namely that increased education across Britain, as has been seen in recent decades, is likely to have a positive impact broadly upon political participation. Even if this did not actually increase net electoral participation it would certainly assist in stifling the downward trend in voting turnout which Britain is currently experiencing. Increasing education is obviously very much a long term strategy which will help to maintain or increase political engagement across all forms. While its long term nature means that the benefits of a strategy of this kind will not be seen for a considerable amount of time, there are clear benefits to such a policy. First, an attempt to increase educational attainment or to broaden participation within it will always be a very popular policy for any political party to run on and therefore has obvious benefits electorally. However, second there are the clear benefits of increased education across any country, particularly economically. A greater level of education will produce a national workforce whom is more productive and innovative making the country more competitive in what is now undeniably a global market place. Finally on this point is that the results in the previous section on Social Capital equally, albeit in a smaller way, suggested that increased education could assist with increasing political participation. The way in which increasing education has been suggested by these two theories whom

approach understanding from very different directions goes to demonstrate the broad benefits such a policy would offer.

Also, given the above results it is equally possible to suggest that drives to increase political party memberships will have the twinned effect of increasing participation both in terms of voting in a General Election as well as in engagement of other forms of less traditional participation such as protesting or joining an activist group for a particular issue. This has been evidenced in practice, rather than merely theoretically, as clearly demonstrated by the Labour Party and the way in which they have conducted their leadership elections since 2015. Membership has increased by more than 300,000 since before the General Election in May 2015 and this saw a turnout of 422,000 in September 2015 leadership election following Ed Miliband's resignation followed by a yet further increased turnout of over 500,000 in 2016 when Jeremy Corbyn's leadership was challenged by several in the party (www.labour.org). It is clear here that not only has membership increased, it has done so because politically engaged individuals want to vote for the leader of a party, that they probably broadly align with, and such a practice can only have positive connotations for broader political engagement. If other parties were to follow suit as regards member engagement and power within the party, this trend of participation could spread further. Further research is necessary in order to confirm that the relationship between political party membership and voting still exists in the way it previously did. What is extremely encouraging here is that political party membership is starting from a very low base with overall membership at slightly under one million (Keen & Apsotolova, March 2017) meaning that in reality it can only increase. Further to this, as shown above as regards the Labour Party there is a clear willingness to join a political party in Britain today, particularly when doing so offers greater influence into how the party is run and who the leader is, with a similar dramatic increase in membership also observable in the SNP over recent years.

General Incentives:

This chapter will now assess General Incentives as the final theory and consider its explanatory value in terms of understanding the recent trends experienced as regards political participation in Britain. Again, this chapter will follow an identical structure as the previous two where the variables in operation will first be outlined before moving to consider the results and necessary trends and then finally concluding as to the theory's explanatory value.

Given the nature of General Incentives Theory and the number of variables present, the statistical analysis is much longer than has been produced for either Social Capital or Cognitive Mobility. Whereas two or three variables were employed to measure each of these theories respectively, it is necessary to use seven variables here so as to be able to appropriately assess the model and fully capture the range of incentives which Clarke et al. (2004) forwarded as important in the choice of political engagement. This will begin with the variables which together make up Rational Choice Theory – Benefits, Costs and Political Efficacy – before then adding in the other four incentives – Individual Benefits, Group Benefits, System Benefits and Social Norms - to create the full model. It is equally necessary to note at this point that these variables proved most difficult to operationalise with the data set used in this study and therefore the conclusions drawn in this section must be considered with this in mind. However, despite this, appropriate effort has been made to match each measurement with the necessary variable and this will be outlined and justified as regards each variable.

In a very similar way to that of Clarke et al. (2004) the benefits of voting will be defined as the difference between the available parties and the policy platforms they would enact should they come into power. Here this will be measured by the variable *“It doesn't really matter which party is in power?”* where the respondent places themselves on a five point scale

between strongly agreeing with this statement where the benefits of voting would be relatively small, through to strongly disagreeing with this statement which would represent large benefits of voting. Should an individual believe that it is largely unimportant which party is in power, as no matter which it is little will change, the benefits of voting will be comparatively small as in their personal view it will not make a noticeable difference. Second is the measurement of the perceived costs of voting. Here Clarke et al. chose to measure this through variables concerning the amount of time and effort required for a respondent to go to the polls and cast a ballot, however this thesis will conceive this slightly differently, in part due to data limitations. This incentive will be measured by the variable *“How much do you agree or disagree that...Voting is the only way people like me can have any say about how the government runs things?”* which again will comprise of a five point scale. Where an individual strongly agrees with this statement the perceived costs of voting will be relatively small as they believe this to be the best means by which to influence government, however someone who strongly disagrees with this statement will feel that the costs of going to vote are comparatively high given the other ways in which they can engage with and influence politics. The final of the three original Rational Choice orientated measurements comes in the form of political efficacy, which refers to a person’s sense of being able to exert political influence and as previously stated, this replaces pivotality which is often used in such model and measures the degree to which an individual’s single vote may prove decisive in an election, a statement which plagues any Rational Choice account of electoral turnout based upon the participation paradox. Here, this thesis will again return to work along similar line to Clarke et al. and will therefore measure both internal as well as external political efficacy. First, Internal Political Efficacy will be measured by the variable *“How much do agree or disagree that ...Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me cannot really understand what is going on”*, as was used to measure Cognitive Mobility in

the previous chapter. This five point scale will assess the degree to which someone feels they personally understand politics and thus from this are in a position to have an influence.

Second, in order to measure External Political Efficacy the variable *“How much do you agree or disagree that...generally speaking those we elect as MPs lose touch with people pretty quickly”* which will consider the level to which an individual feels that by electing an MP to represent them in Westminster actually gives them any political influence in reality. The combination of these two variables will make it possible to observe the degree to which an individual feels that can have a real impact in the political sphere and from this how it affects their choice to engage in politics through either the traditional means of the ballot box or alternatively in the form of a petition, demonstration or protest.

Where General Incentives then looks to build on the Rational Choice Model and eliminate the participation paradox which it creates is through the addition of the aforementioned extra four variables. First is Individual Benefits which will be measured by the five point scale from the question *“How much interest do you generally have in what is going on in politics?”* which works from *“Not at all”* through to having *“A great deal”* of interest. It is plausible to conclude that an individual whom is more interested in politics is going to perceive the private returns of voting to be larger than someone who has little interest, purely based on the fact that they are engaging in something which interests them. The second additional benefit added by Clarke et al. is Group Benefits which shall be measured by the variable of *“How much do you agree or disagree that...people like me have no say in what the government does?”* which in the same way as above will be measured on a five point scale ranging from strongly agreeing to this statement through to strongly disagreeing. Group Benefits, as discussed, are those which affect people like themselves in society or equally those who are perceived as requiring a “helping hand” such as the disabled or pensioners, which is represented in this question by the phrase “people like me”.

The penultimate variable used in this analysis is defined by Clarke et al. as System Benefits which refer to those benefits that arise for the democratic system through the act of citizens voting however in order to measure this appropriately, it is necessary to divert away from the Views on Voting measurement used to assess the former two theories. Instead of measuring variables against this, it will be used as a binary variable in order to assess the effect of whether an individual believes it is every citizens duty to vote in an election. Thus, in this chapter, the General Incentives Model will only be considered for its effect on an individual's propensity to vote and their propensity to engage in other forms of politics rather than also including the effect it has upon their view of voting as was done previously. The question asked was "*Which of these statements comes closest to your view about General Elections? In a General Election... 'It is not really worth voting', 'People should only vote if they care who wins', or 'It is everyone's duty to vote'?*" The first two responses will be combined meaning it will be possible to then assess the effect of these compared to believing that it is everyone's duty to vote.

The final incentive that will be taken from Clarke et al. work in '*Political Choice in Britain*' is Social Norms which surround voting behaviour as well as broader political engagement. This centres on the belief that should those around us and those close to us believe that politics and engaging in it is important, this will in turn impact our personal view of these matters. The variable used in order to measure this will be "*How often do you talk about politics with...other family members?*" which comprises of a six point scale starting with "*Never*" talking about politics through to discussing these matters "*Everyday*". This will be used as a proxy as to the social norms one has around them as it is plausible that there is a very strong correlation between the amount someone discusses politics with those around them and the positive views that those around them must therefore have of engagement in politics through voting as well as other means.

Before moving to consider the actual regression tables, there are two important notes to make here. The first is that the Expressive Benefits used by Clarke et al. in their works, which they measure as the sense of satisfaction received by voting for a party that one supports, have been excluded from the analysis of the General Incentives Model here. From what has been concluded in the literature this variable appears redundant due to the dramatic fall in party membership and association in Britain and this proved to be one of the less significant variables in their original model. Equally, the broader benefit which they are looking to cover here as regards demonstrating support for political institutions and processes is very much covered when considering System Benefits and the scope that this variable has. The second note is that unlike the other two model it is much more difficult to clearly demonstrate trends as regards each of the variables chosen to measure the benefits outlined above respectively.

Results:

Following this description of how the analysis will be undertaken it is now necessary to progress to presenting the regression results tables and then the interpretations and discussion which is in turn necessary after these. First, the results will show the individual effect of each of the respective variables chosen to measure General Incentives individually for their effect on voting as well as then other forms of participation. Subsequent to this however, all the variables will be combined in a single model in order to assess the overall applicability of a General Incentives model in explaining the recent trends in British political participation where electoral turnout has experienced a steady decline whereas other forms of participation, often characterised as non-institutionalised or less traditional, have seen a large uptake.

The first three tables show the effect of the original Rational Choice Theory variables on voting – Benefits, Costs and Political Efficacy - before the latter four variables which will follow this in order to fully represent the General Incentives Model.

Table 29 – Voted

Variable				
Benefits	0.386*** (0.034)	0.452*** (0.036)	0.278*** (0.038)	0.304*** (0.039)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Personal	No	Yes	No	Yes
Economic and Political	No	No	Yes	Yes
N	4225	4225	4225	4225
Nagelkerke Pseudo R²	0.048	0.195	0.244	0.295

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

Table 30 - Voted

Variable				
Costs	-0.250*** (0.024)	-0.189*** (0.025)	-0.190*** (0.026)	-0.178*** (0.027)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Personal	No	Yes	No	Yes
Economic and Political	No	No	Yes	Yes
Nagelkerke Pseudo R²	0.032	0.151	0.217	0.259
N	8531	8531	8531	8531

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

Table 31 - Voted

Variable				
Internal Political Efficacy	0.245*** (0.023)	0.286*** (0.025)	0.182*** (0.025)	0.194*** (0.026)
External Political Efficacy	0.192*** (0.029)	0.239*** (0.031)	0.149*** (0.031)	0.174*** (0.032)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Personal	No	Yes	No	Yes
Economic and Political	No	No	Yes	Yes
Nagelkerke Pseudo R²	0.042	0.175	0.224	0.268
N	9540	9540	9540	9540

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

These three tables show the expected results whereby an increase in the perceived benefits of voting, increases the propensity of an individual to vote; an increase in the perceived costs of voting, reduces an individual's propensity to vote and finally that an increase in either internal or external political efficacy will again result in an increased propensity to vote. Each of these effects remains unaffected by any set of controls which is applied to the relationship and therefore it cannot be claimed that any such factors are driving these associations. It is equally noteworthy that all three of these effects are approximately the same size, thus it could not be said that any one of them dominates any of the others or provides the driving force behind a Rational Choice Model explanation. The only potential exception to this statement is regarding External Political Efficacy which proves to have a smaller effect compared to its contemporaries.

Tables 32-35 will now detail the incentives added in order to create the full General Incentives Model and the effect that each of these has upon an individual's propensity to vote

in a General Election. As stated, adding these variables to the model will help remove the participation paradox which plagues Rational Choice.

Table 32 - Voted

Variable				
Individual Benefits	0.667***	0.639***	0.472***	0.467***
	(0.019)	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.021)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Personal	No	Yes	No	Yes
Economic and				
Political	No	No	Yes	Yes
Nagelkerke Pseudo				
R²	0.150	0.237	0.259	0.294
N	15186	15186	15186	15186
***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05				

The effect of Individual Benefits proves significant regardless of any controls which are put in place however, the effect can in part be explained by a host of Economic and Political factors which results in the effect reducing by approximately a third with this reduction remaining once both control sets are applied together.

Table 33 - Voted

Variable				
Group Benefits	0.179***	0.211***	0.138***	0.149***
	(0.023)	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.026)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Personal	No	Yes	No	Yes
Economic and Political	No	No	Yes	Yes
Nagelkerke Pseudo				
R²	0.023	0.162	0.210	0.265
N	8867	8867	8867	8867
***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05				

The effect of Group Benefits remains almost exactly consistent across this table where the effect only changes most noticeably when it increases following the introduction of the Personal controls suggesting that these factors are actually masking the strength of the relationship to some degree.

Table 34 - Voted

Variable				
System Benefits	1.077***	0.985***	0.914***	0.877***
	(0.026)	(0.027)	(0.027)	(0.028)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Personal	No	Yes	No	Yes
Economic and Political	No	No	Yes	Yes
Nagelkerke Pseudo				
R²	0.272	0.325	0.352	0.376
N	10061	10061	10061	10061
***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05				

Here both the Personal set of controls as well as the Economic and Political reduce the effect slightly despite the effect of System Benefits remaining largely stable. Therefore, as expected, should someone believe that it is everyone's duty to vote, they will, themselves, choose to vote when presented with the opportunity.

Table 35 - Voted

Variable				
Social Norms	0.174**	0.263***	0.074	0.124
	(0.060)	(0.066)	(0.068)	(0.071)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Personal	No	Yes	No	Yes
Economic and Political	No	No	Yes	Yes
Nagelkerke Pseudo R²	0.012	0.194	0.277	0.336
N	1044	1044	1044	1044

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

Of these additional four incentives, the former three each demonstrate themselves to be both statistically significant, where they have a positive association with voting, as well as proving relatively stable regardless of any control set which is applied to the relationship. The magnitude of each of these falls slightly when all controls are in place however, each remains noticeably significant. What is potentially the most interesting observation from these results however is the relative size of these effects comparative to one another. While both General Incentives and Cognitive Mobility have a strong theme of individual choice where citizens make political and voting decisions in order to maximise their overall personal benefits, it is actually System Benefits which proves to show the strongest effect on an individual's propensity to vote. This offers quite a paradox in what has been hypothesised as a very individualistic modern world in which people do things for their own personal and private benefits, with little regard for society as a whole. The size of the effect that System Benefits

produced goes directly against this thought and instead suggests that many people are in fact inclined to vote by a sense of duty to the political system and the benefits for democracy more broadly which this will in turn produce.

Table 35 shows a slightly different picture whereby Social Norms, the last of the additional incentives, while originally proving highly statistically significant can be explained by a variety of Economic and Political factors. The effect actually increases in significance when the Personal controls are in place compared to the original result; however the association becomes insignificant when the second set of controls are applied instead and then subsequently once both sets are applied together in the final model.

Having considered the effect that each component of the General Incentives Model has upon an individual's propensity to vote, it is now necessary to turn to the second phenomena of the increasing engagement in alternative forms of political participation such as signing a petition or attending a demonstration and the explanatory value the theory has here. The following results unfortunately provide a lot less support for the General Incentives Model in terms of explaining this second phenomena compared to the broad success it can initially claim as regards its understanding of the decline in electoral turnout in Britain over recent decades. Again, this discussion will begin by considering the three initial components of Rational Choice Theory before moving to look at the additional four incentives which assist in completing the full General Incentives Model.

Table 36 - Other Political Participation

Variable				
Benefits	0.096**	0.093**	0.061	0.063
	(0.032)	(0.033)	(0.034)	(0.034)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Personal	No	Yes	No	Yes
Economic and Political	No	No	Yes	Yes
R²	0.367	0.369	0.371	0.373
N	9054	9054	9054	9054

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

Table 37 - Other Political Participation

Variable				
Costs	-0.166	-0.235*	-0.192	-0.197
	(0.105)	(0.112)	(0.110)	(0.116)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Personal	No	Yes	No	Yes
Economic and Political	No	No	Yes	Yes
Nagelkerke Pseudo R²	0.438	0.483	0.469	0.500
N	14284	14284	14284	14284

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

Table 38 - Other Political Participation

Variable				
Internal Political Efficacy	0.258*	0.161	0.178	0.130
	(0.116)	(0.123)	(0.121)	(0.128)
External Political Efficacy	0.054	0.060	0.057	0.054
	(0.118)	(0.120)	(0.120)	(0.122)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Personal	No	Yes	No	Yes
Economic and Political	No	No	Yes	Yes
Nagelkerke Pseudo R²	0.427	0.471	0.453	0.486
N	12341	12341	12341	12341

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

From each of these original three results tables it is observable that none of these variables have any significant association with whether an individual has participated in politics through alternative means other than the very traditional way of voting in a General Election. The effect in the first table does prove significant initially and remains so even when the Personal set of controls are applied, however, this significance disappears once the Economic and Political controls are applied as well as when both sets are present together. Equally, from Table 38 it can be observed that without any controls in place there is a significant positive association between the level of Internal Political Efficiency an individual feels they have and their propensity to have engaged in other forms of politics. This result differs from the one found in the previous chapter analysing the theory of Cognitive Mobility because this is a combined model of political efficacy which combines both the internal and external measure together in one model.

Table 39 - Other Political Participation

Variable				
Individual Benefits	0.132***	0.136***	0.106***	0.108***
	(0.018)	(0.019)	(0.020)	(0.020)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Personal	No	Yes	No	Yes
Economic and Political	No	No	Yes	Yes
Nagelkerke Pseudo				
R²	0.330	0.334	0.333	0.335
N	18932	18932	18932	18932
***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05				

Here it is observable that Individual Benefits, as measured by the general interest which an individual has in politics, proves to have a significant positive association with whether someone has chosen to take political action outside of the traditional and institutionalised form of voting. This is almost completely unaffected by either of the control sets where the effect remains largely stable.

Table 40 - Other Political Participation

Variable				
Group Benefits	0.095**	0.093**	0.076*	0.078*
	(0.030)	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.031)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Personal	No	Yes	No	Yes
Economic and Political	No	No	Yes	Yes
Nagelkerke Pseudo				
R²	0.401	0.404	0.406	0.408
N	13574	13574	13574	13574
***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05				

Group Benefits however prove to be both slightly less significant originally as well as then falling in significance firstly when the Economic and Political controls are applied alone as well as then when both control sets are applied in unison. However, the effect does remain significant throughout this. Therefore, the more someone agrees with the statement “*People like me have no say in what the government does?*” the more likely they are to have engaged in other forms of politics.

Table 41 - Other Political Participation

Variable				
System Benefits	0.365*	0.484**	0.383*	0.435**
	(0.141)	(0.149)	(0.150)	(0.153)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Personal	No	Yes	No	Yes
Economic and Political	No	No	Yes	Yes
Nagelkerke Pseudo				
R²	0.368	0.400	0.398	0.415
N	7016	7016	7016	7016
***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05				

System Benefits offers a very interesting picture where there is equally a positive association between believing that it is everyone’s civic duty to vote and choosing to partake in other forms of political participation. The magnitude of this effect is masked slightly by personal demographics found within the first control set and hence the significance of the effect increases before falling again when the Economic and Political set of controls are present instead. Finally, when applied in unison, the significance increases once again due to the reintroduction of the Personal controls.

Table 42 - Other Political Participation

Variable				
Social Norms	0.145 (0.906)	-0.031 (0.927)	0.386 (0.909)	1.075 (2.605)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Personal	No	Yes	No	Yes
Economic and Political	No	No	Yes	Yes
Nagelkerke Pseudo R²	0.002	0.458	0.352	0.650
N	937	937	937	937
***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05				

This final table regarding alternative forms of political engagement offers an even more negative picture of the one which was provided in Table 35 regarding the effect of Social Norms on an individual's propensity to vote. Here there is no significant effect of Social Norms on the likelihood one has engaged in other forms of political participation regardless of any control set which may be present. Hence, overall, Social Norms has no effect upon an individual's propensity to engage politically. However, the results regarding Social Norms make sense from a rational actor point of view. As Kofford and Miller (1991) highlight, such norms are the product of social conditioning rather than of rational decision making, as is obviously suggested by any form of Rational Choice Model.

It is clear from the four tables above that these variables equally offer relatively little support for the General Incentives Model as regards its ability to explain the decision people make when choosing whether to engage in less traditional forms of politics and thus the trends which have been experienced recently in Britain as regards this, although they do offer more insight than the former three. Only one – Individual Benefits - of the seven variables tested here have proved to be highly significant in their association with whether someone has

chosen to engage in politics outside of the medium of voting at a General Election. One result which is again noteworthy however is that of System Benefits in Table 41 which again rejects the idea that the modern day world is one which centres around the idea of citizens working in an individualistic manner and doing things purely for the benefit that such an action is expected to bring them personally rather than considering the effects and needs of society as a whole with the need for this support of the democratic system.

Having considered the effect of each individual component of the General Incentives Model on both voting and other forms of political participation, it is now necessary to combine these incentives in order to create a full model and in turn observe the effect of the model as a whole rather than merely the separate individual components of it. This will be done first through the creation of the original Rational Choice Model, comprising of the original three components of Benefits, Costs and Political Efficacy (Internal and External) before added the other incentives which then work to make the full General Incentives Model which has been discussed throughout this thesis. Here, both whether an individual chose to vote at the last General Election as well as whether they have engaged in any alternative forms of political engagement will be shown in one table together. This will make the effect of General Incentives observable on political participation across the board.

Table 43 - Rational Choice Model

Variable	<i>Voted</i>	<i>Other Political Participation</i>
Benefits	0.321*** (0.033)	-0.261 (0.674)
Costs	-0.351*** (0.028)	-0.794 (0.738)
Internal Political Efficacy	0.251*** (0.029)	-0.081 (0.679)
External Political Efficacy	0.075* (0.037)	-0.056 (0.738)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	Yes
Nagelkerke Pseudo R²	0.088	0.055
N	6252	2781

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

From Table 43 it is clear at first glance that Rational Choice Theory offers a much greater potential insight into the traditional form of participation in voting but fails to offer the same level of insight as regards other forms of political participation. While both the Benefits and Costs as well as Internal Political Efficacy remain significant and the size of their effect very similar to when they were tested individually, External Political Efficacy loses a large degree of the statistical significance it previously held. There is similarly little effect in the second column regarding whether an individual had taken alternative forms of political action and resultantly none of the variables are significant. From this original combined model it is therefore necessary to conclude that while a Rational Choice Model may be able to offer some explanatory value as regards voting behaviour, it cannot provide the same when it comes to other forms of political action.

Table 44 - General Incentives minus Group Benefits

Variable	<i>Voted</i>	<i>Other Political Participation</i>
Benefits	0.135** (0.045)	0.206** (0.073)
Costs	-0.272*** (0.038)	-0.360*** (0.068)
Internal Political Efficacy	0.040 (0.041)	0.082 (0.071)
External Political Efficacy	0.054 (0.050)	0.024 (0.080)
Individual Benefits	0.421*** (0.040)	0.330*** (0.071)
System Benefits	0.890*** (0.041)	0.946 (0.068)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	Yes
Nagelkerke Pseudo R²	0.322	0.322
N	4401	1551

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

In Table 44 two of the General Incentives variables are added to the model – Individual Benefits and System Benefits – and this has a further impact on the results. As regards voting, while Benefits and Costs remain largely similar in both their significance and size, Internal Political Efficacy loses its significance in a similar way to External Political Efficacy in the original Rational Choice Model. However, both of the two additional variables added into this model prove to be significant on whether an individual voted. In terms of alternative forms of political participation, the findings here are quite interesting. Firstly, only Individual Benefits of the two additional ones proves to be significant, however, secondly both Benefits and Costs become significant at this stage. Both of these results suggest that a Selective

Incentives Model may offer more explanatory value than a full General Incentives Model here, although the actual make up of this differs for each of the two forms of participation being measured here.

Table 45 - General Incentives

Variable	<i>Voted</i>	<i>Other Political Participation</i>
Benefits	0.172** (0.071)	-0.101 (0.719)
Costs	-0.314*** (0.065)	-0.691 (0.795)
Internal Political Efficacy	0.059 (0.068)	-0.037 (0.712)
External Political Efficacy	0.079 (0.081)	0.187 (0.790)
Individual Benefits	0.357*** (0.067)	-0.225 (0.809)
System Benefits	0.980*** (0.065)	0.491 (0.758)
Group Benefits	-0.042 (0.069)	-0.698 (0.704)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	Yes
Nagelkerke Pseudo R²	0.337	0.098
N	1674	1551

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

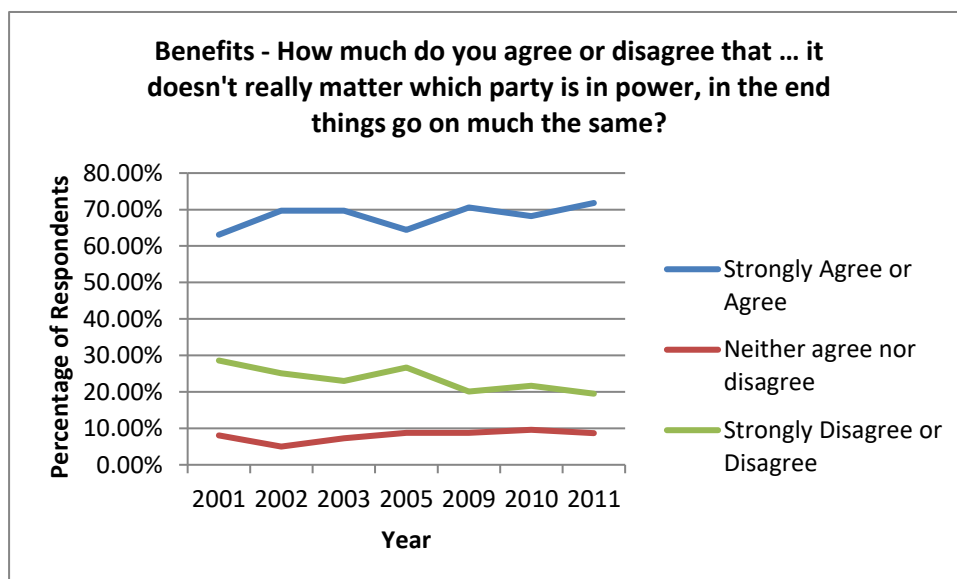
The final combined model is presented in the table above and adds the final variable included in the full General Incentives Model – Group Benefits. Due to data limitations it is not possible to also add in Social Norms as was done individually, however this proved to be insignificant on both forms of participation and therefore was unlikely to add any explanatory

power to this full model. Firstly, as regards voting behaviour, the results here fall very much in line with those directly above and therefore Group Benefits adds relatively little in the context of General Incentives. However, there is a much greater effect once Group Benefits are added into the model as regards alternative forms of participation as by adding in Group Benefits all variables are once again insignificant.

Trends:

Having assessed the significance of each of these variables, both individually as well as when combined, it is now necessary to consider the movement within these variables. As previously discussed, in order to hold explanatory power there must be a relevant movement in a variable as well as it holding statistical significance for it to be considered insightful. The following charts will offer an idea of the trends which have been seen however it is not necessarily as conclusive as has been the case regarding the former two theories.

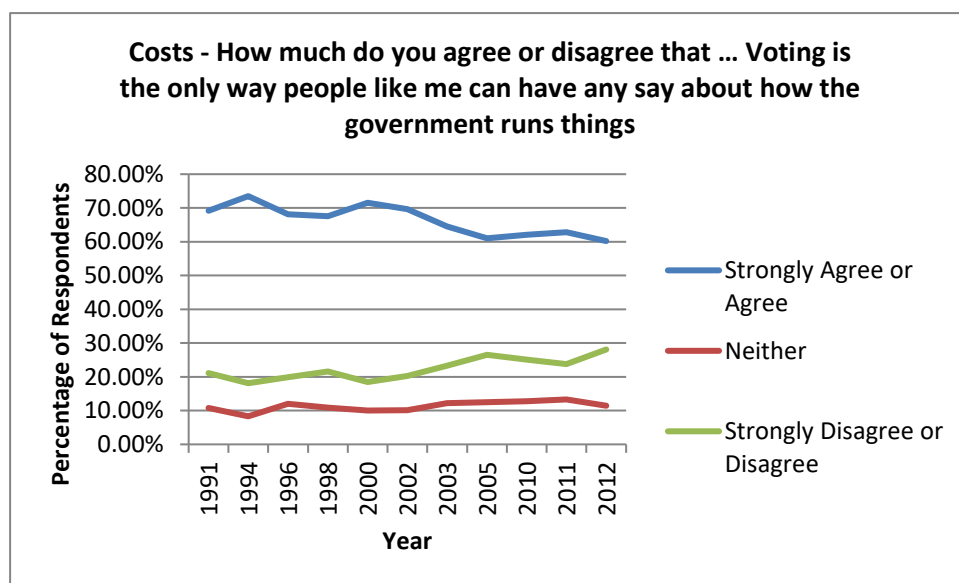
Chart 10



Source: *BSA*

The chart above confirms that there has been a steady trend by which people are now more inclined to believe that it does not matter which party is in power, however this trend is not particularly strong. The number of people who strongly agree or agree with the above statement has increased from 63% to 72% which remains noticeable. This finding does mean however that the perceived benefits of voting are lessened, which does not help the standing of the General Incentives Theory in explaining the necessary trends.

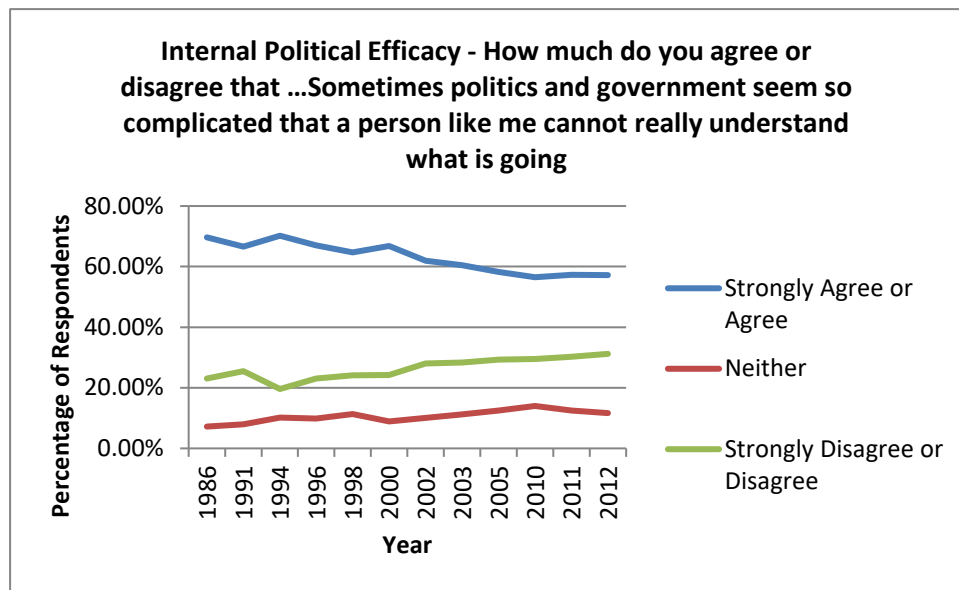
Chart 11



Source: *BSA*

The second chart provides greater support for the trends seen in British political participation and the ability of a General Incentives Model to explain these. The number of people who subscribe to the opinion that voting is the only way in which they can influence government has noticeably fallen and thus the costs of voting then increase. If someone believes they have the ability to influence government in other ways the perceived costs of voting will in turn become larger.

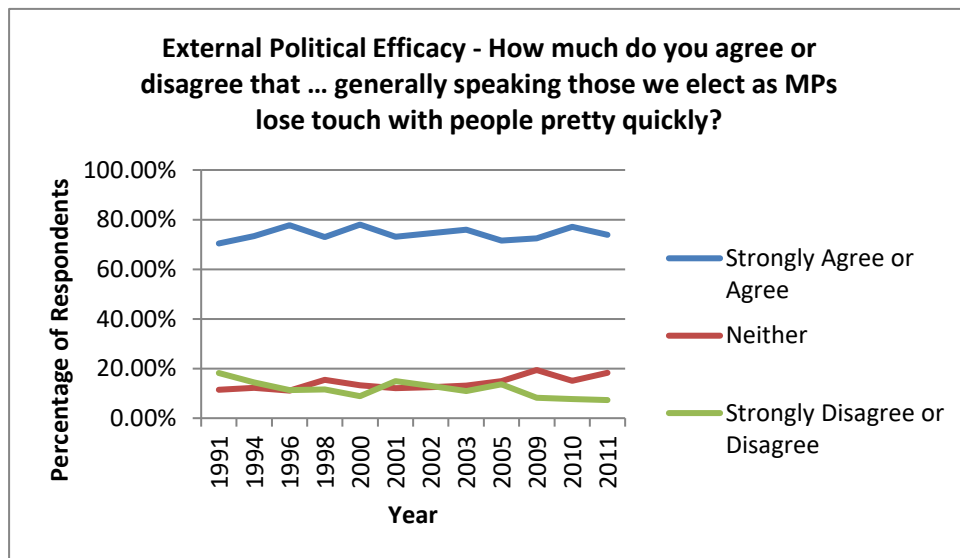
Chart 12



Source: *BSA*

The first of the two measures of political efficacy shows a clear trend where people no longer believe government and politics to be too complicated for them and instead choose to disagree with this statement. This represents a clear increase in people's perceived political efficacy.

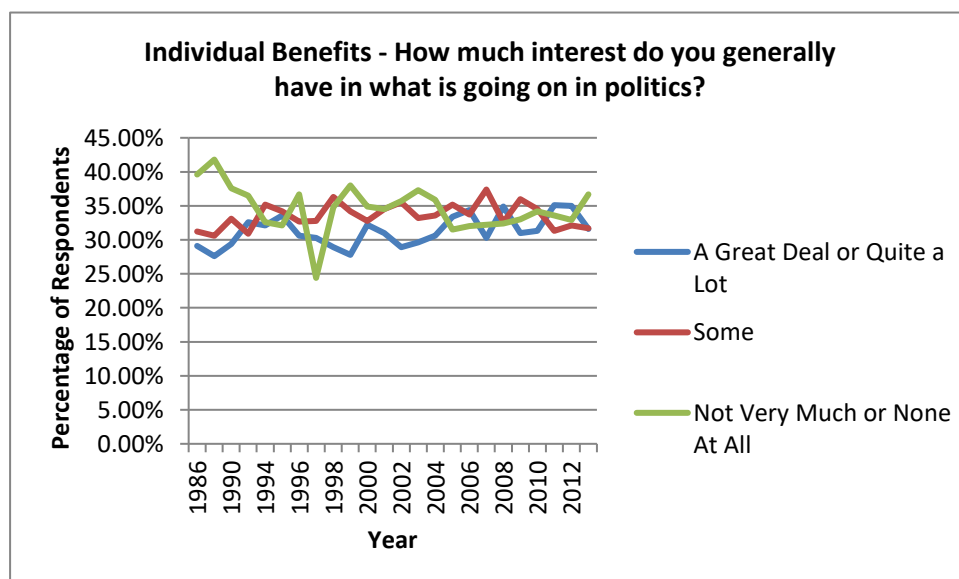
Chart 13



Source: *BSA*

The second measure of political efficacy, external in this case, does not show a similar trend to that of above. Here it would be wrong to claim any particular trend was observable and instead only shows a small fluctuation in people's view but without any great shift in the general consensus is observable.

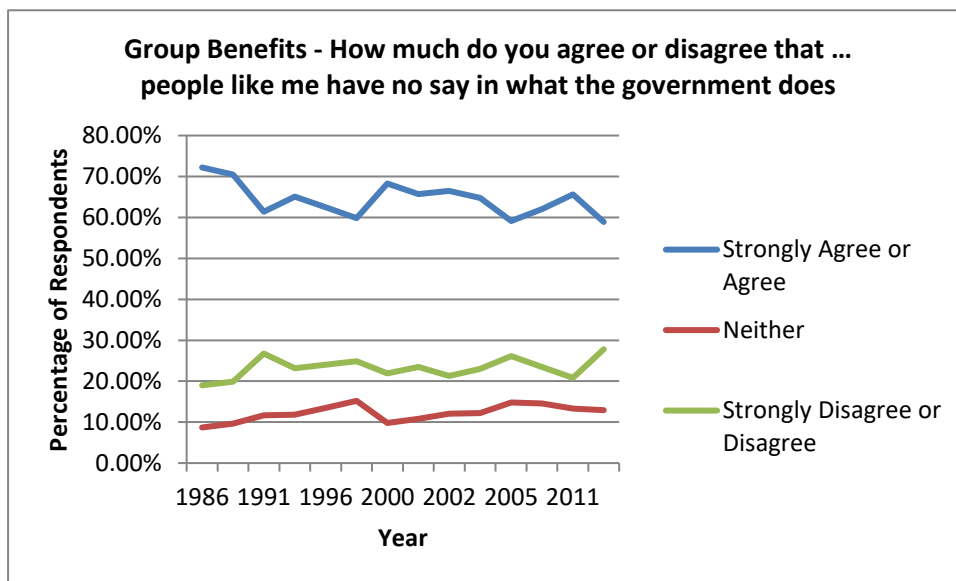
Chart 14



Source: *BSA*

Moving to the additional incentives which complete the General Incentives Model, it is again not possible to pick out many obvious trends. While there have been fluctuations between 1986 and the modern day, overall there has been little change in the number of people who state their interest in politics to be represented by the above statements. As such the Individual Benefits discussed as part of the model have changed little over time.

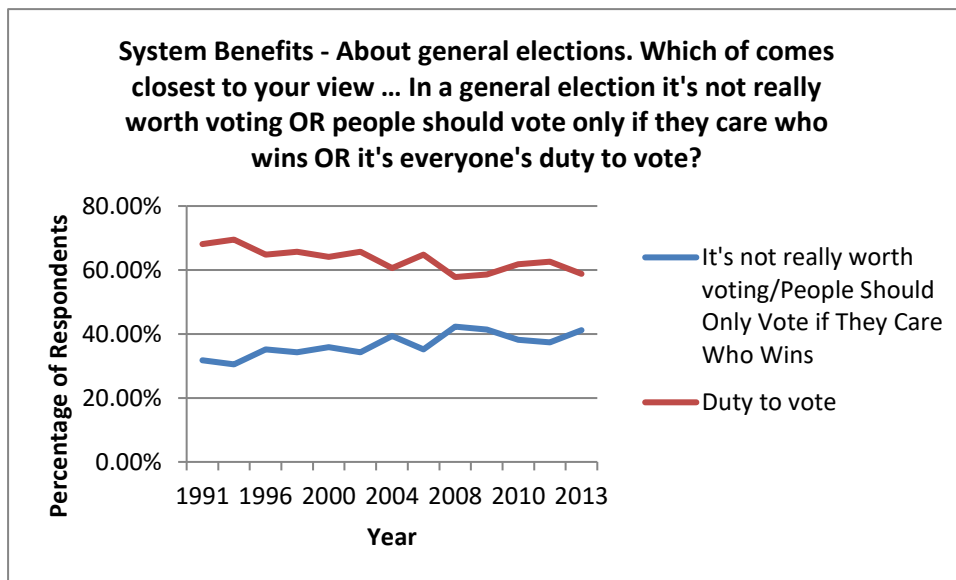
Chart 15



Source: *BSA*

In terms of Group Benefits there is a little more movement whereby less people now believe that people like them have no say in what the government does and on the reverse of this, more people now disagree with the above statement. As such, there has been an increase in the Group Benefits that people feel can be produced by being active in the political realm.

Chart 16



Source: *BSA*

Finally, there is a very clear shift in views as regards the System Benefits discussed by Clarke et al. (2004). A steady downward trend in the number of people who believe that it is a duty to vote is observable in this chart and in turn the number of people who believe that there is no point in voting or believing that people should only vote when they care who wins is on the rise.

As regards the last component of the General Incentives Model in Social Norms, it is unfortunately not possible to chart the trends in this over time due to limitations with the data set at hand. The variable which is being used to measure Social Norms in this study has only been asked once in the BSA Survey and hence with this single result it is not possible to chart this particular trend over time.

Overall, there has been a clear shift in some of the perceived incentives which create the General Incentive Model whereas other have seen little change over the period of this study.

Analysis:

It is now necessary to interpret these results in conjunction with the above trends and discuss what, if any, explanatory power they hold in terms of explaining the trends of declining electoral turnout at General Elections as well as increasing engagement in other forms of participation such as signing a petition, attending a protest or joining an activist group. There will first be a discussion of the models associated with the former trend as regards voting and then the latter trend of alternative forms of participation. Following this will be the conclusion of these results and the policy implications which these lead to. First, it is important to again note that while statistical significance is necessary, it is not sufficient to claim explanatory value and thus those variables which have shown little movement will be able to offer very little insight. As can be clearly observed this is more noteworthy here than in the previous two chapters.

When each of the incentives was tested individually for their effect on an individual's propensity to vote the results were very positive, where all but Social Norms proved to be significant, and thus these results offered a large amount of insight into this declining trend. While it was not possible to gain much from considering those variables which had not seen a great deal of change over the period of this study, where there had been such trends, these broadly fit with the decline in electoral turnout. Of the original three Rational Choice Model variables, both Benefits and Costs can be used to explain this downward trend. As was previously shown, the perceived benefits of voting have fallen (Chart 9) and given the positive relationship between this and an individual's propensity to vote, it would be expected to contribute to depressing voter turnout. Similarly, the perceived costs of voting have increased (Chart 10) and therefore, given the significant negative relationship between this and the chance of someone voting in the General Election, it would equally be expected to depress electoral turnout.

However, the additional variables which will later be added to create the full General Incentives Model offer relatively little insight at this point. Some variables – External Political Efficacy and Individual benefits – have seen little change over time it is possible to dismiss these as holding any explanatory value; should the variable not have moved it is not possible to use it in order to understand variables which have shown significant movement. Equally some variables – Internal Political Efficacy and Group Benefits – have increased over the period of this study and given that both have positive associations with an individual's propensity to vote, again it is possible to dismiss these at this stage as having no great explanatory value, although it is possible to claim that these may well have slowed the decline in turnout that has been experienced. The one variable which proves to be of interest is System Benefits which has demonstrated a very clear downward trend whereby less and less people, over the period of this study, believe that it is their duty to vote at a General Election. Given the positive association System Benefits holds with voting behaviour, a fall in this would then equally be expected to cause a fall in voting turnout.

Having considered the variables individually, it is now necessary to begin to build up the model in order to work towards creating a full General Incentives Model. This was done first by using the original Rational Choice Model and the three variables – Benefits, Costs and Political Efficacy (External and Internal) – which comprise this in order to observe how these variables interact with each other rather than merely the effect they have when treated independently. As is shown clearly in Table 43, this original Rational Choice Model proves to be significant on each variable of the four within it. As such the same conclusion can be drawn as above where the model at this stage suggests it holds some explanatory value in understanding the trend of declining electoral turnout in Britain. Again, the results for the first two variables of Benefits and Costs suggest a downward trend in voting turnout, little can be gained from the result regarding External Political Efficacy and Internal Political

Efficacy still appears to potentially be slowing this downward trend. At this stage though, it is clear that a Rational Choice based model still holds a certain degree of explanatory value, due to the two former results; and thus initially supports Hypothesis 8.

Next, two of the additional incentive variables are added – Individual Benefits and System Benefits – in order to once again further build up the model before creating the full General Incentives Model. Group Benefits will be added last as this reduces the sample size significantly and thus it is necessary to observe how these relationships stand up both with and without this variable, with the larger and smaller sample size. In this model, both Benefits and Costs retain their significance and hence still point towards a decline in electoral turnout. However, with the two extra variables added, both forms of Political Efficacy lose their significance whereas the newly introduced incentives each prove to be positively significant. Whereas it is not possible to gain much insight from the statistical significance of Individual Benefits due to the lack of change in this variable, the fact that System Benefits proves to be significant here, as it did individually, supports the results of both Benefits and Costs and hence that there will be a fall in electoral turnout. Therefore at this point a form of Selective Benefits is emerging as potentially holding the most explanatory power as regards this trend.

Finally, when Group Benefits are added to the previous model in order to create a full General Incentives Model, there is very little change to the results from the previous model, whereby adding the additional incentive of Group Benefits does not noticeably change the results. As such in a full General Incentives Model, four of the seven variables tested prove to be significant on an individual's propensity to vote in a General Election with three of these – Benefits, Costs and System Benefits - suggesting the downward trend that has been experienced in Britain. These results therefore point far more towards a model of Selective Benefits in terms of understanding and explaining this trend rather than a full General

Incentives Model. Here it is therefore necessary to reject Hypothesis 9 as General Incentives clearly has some explanatory power and equally it is possible to offer limited support to Hypothesis 8.

Having considered the explanatory power of the General Incentive Model on the decline in voting, it is now necessary to turn to the second trend where engagement in alternative forms of political participation have been on the rise and the explanatory value the theory holds on this count. Again this will be done first by considering each of the variables individually and then subsequently by building these up into a combined model towards a full General Incentives Model.

First, when considered individually, there is relatively little significance of any of the variables on an individual's propensity to engage in alternative forms of political participation, such as signing a petition, attending a protest or joining an activist group. Only three of the seven variables measured proved to have any level of significance and of these only one is in line with the aforementioned trend, however each of the three variables holding significance are the additional incentives which will be added to the Rational Choice Model rather than any of the original three variables. First, while Individual Benefits proved to be significant it is not possible to take much from this due to the fact that Individual Benefits have shown very little change over this period and thus cannot be used to explain an upward trend in alternative forms of participation. Second, Group Benefits have increased over the same period and given the positive association on an individual's propensity to engage in such forms of politics it would be expected that this would push engagement upwards. The third variable of significance is System Benefits and while this is again positively significant given the dramatic fall in the number of people who believe it is their duty to vote, and hence the dramatic fall in perceived System Benefits, this result goes against the trend which has been observed and suggests a downward trend in such engagement.

Next, the three original Rational Choice variables are combined to create this first model; however, as was the case with these three incentives originally, there is no significance on any of these variables. Therefore at this stage it is not possible to claim that a Rational Choice based model holds any degree of explanatory power in understanding and explaining this trend.

In a similar way to as was done previously both Individual Benefits and System Benefits were then added to the Rational Choice Model and here there is a much greater level of statistical significance and thus potential explanatory value. Three variables – Benefits, Costs and Individual Benefits - prove to be significant in this model, however they say very little about the trend at hand. First, both Benefits and Costs suggest a downward trend in this form of engagement which is the exact opposite of what has been observed in Britain. Second, Individual Benefits proves to have a positive association with alternative forms of political engagement however due to the lack of movement in this variable over the period of the study it is not possible to use this in order to explain this increase in alternative forms of political engagement.

Finally, the full General Incentives Model is created by adding the final incentives of Group Benefits and here the significance of all the variables is reduced once again meaning that it would not be possible to claim here that either a General Incentives Model or even a Selective Incentives Model could provide much insight into this trend in British political participation. This therefore suggests the exact reverse of the results produced as regards the first trend and provides evidence in favour of Hypothesis 9, therefore making it necessary to reject Hypothesis 8. Equally, due to this result it is necessary to reject Hypothesis 10 which stated that General Incentives could fully explain the two trends at hand.

Overall the General Incentives Model provides only a very mixed picture in terms of explaining the recent trends in British political participation and therefore only offers limited insight on both trends however especially as regards the latter. Equally at this stage, it is important to again note that due to the data set used the variables chosen in this analysis do not always completely align with that which they are trying to measure and therefore the conclusions must be considered with this in mind. In terms of explaining the decline in electoral turnout it is possible to look to General Incentives to provide some level of insight although this largely comes in the form of a Selective Incentives Model. It would be incorrect to claim that each variable in the full model offers a potent insight, even though these each prove to be significant individually. However, as regards the second trend of alternative forms of participation, General Incentives, either in its full form or as a refined Selective Incentives Model offers very little insight into this trend. While certain incentives may have proven to be significant both individually as well as then in the second combined model, these did not align with the current trends and nor did they retain their significance when combined in any form of a Rational Choice or General Incentives Model. Hence, it is necessary to support Hypothesis 9 which stated that a General incentives Model would have very little, if any, explanatory power in understanding political participation and while it is not possible to comprehensively support this claim, it is necessary to provide this with a significant amount of support given the results found in this chapter. To support the first hypothesis by agreeing with Clarke et al. and claiming that the General Incentives Model provides a strong predictor of voting and other forms of political participation would be incorrect. Equally, to support the third hypothesis and claim that the theory can fully explain the two opposing trends would again be incorrect based on the findings produced above, as at best it can only offer limited insights into one of the two trends; the decline in electoral

turnout. While it can offer some insight into the former, neither the significance of the variables or the trends they display demonstrate any insight as regards the latter.

Hypothesis 8 – Rejected – General Incentives has not been shown to be a good predictor of political participation and thus cannot fully explain either of the two trends at hand

Hypothesis 9 – Supported – General Incentives offers very little explanatory value in terms of the two trends

Hypothesis 10 – Rejected – General Incentives cannot explain either trend in full and therefore does not possess the explanatory power to understand the changes in participation in British engagement through the two trends considered

The results as regards voting overall actually fall very much in line with that of Whitely and Seyd (1996) who consider the explanatory power of both Rational Choice Theory as well as a General Incentives Model in terms of explaining party activism. They find that while Rational Choice does have important explanatory power, it provides only an incomplete account of participation, as was found here. However, their results equally demonstrate that what they term a “reduced form” model offers the best explanatory account of party activism, which sits very much in line with the findings here and what was described as a “Selective Incentives” Model.

From these results, due to the lack of explanatory value offered by the theory, it is not necessarily possible to draw a great amount of information as regards policy implications, however there are a few important results which can provide this to some extent. The most noteworthy of these comes from the results regarding System Benefits, which proved to be significant on both trends independently as well as in the combined models as regards voting. Whether an individual believed it to be “*Everyone’s duty to vote*” compared to believing

either that there is “*No point in voting*” or that “*People should only vote when they care who wins*”, had a highly significant positive association on both whether an individual had voted in the last election as well as whether they had participated in alternative forms of engagement in politics. From this result, it is possible to suggest any policy which looks to change this view towards more people believing that it is every citizen's duty to vote in an election will have a positive effect both on electoral turnout as well as increasing engagement in politics through other means such as signing a petition or attending a protest. The best way in which to do this is obviously far more ambiguous than the result itself but potentially the most promising way in which to achieve this would be through an almost Social Capital line of thinking by looking to increase citizens attachment to their community and in turn increase their feeling of civic duty and hence their belief that it is their duty to vote. One of the largest incentives of political participation is clearly the wider societal benefit. As previously mentioned as regards incentivising and creating Social Capital, this can take a wide variety of forms, from increased educational participation to fostering community ties within local areas and neighbourhoods. Again, this would necessarily take the form of a long term policy and could not be successful merely in a matter of weeks or months. It would take generations to reverse this downward trend in electoral turnout and in turn reset it in an upward trajectory. In the case of alternative forms of participation it is merely a matter of continuing on the current upward trajectory.

The second result it is possible to draw upon is Individual Benefits which proves to have a positive association with both voting as well as alternative forms of participation when considered individually as well as when placed in a combined model. Individual Benefits was measured here by an individual's interest in politics generally and hence any way in which this general interest is increased, will in turn be expected to drive an increase in both electoral turnout as well as a rise in alternative forms of participation. The best way in which to

increase the general level of political interest in the country is obviously extremely debateable, with no clear way in which it would be best to do this. However, again, it is possible to draw upon the results of a previous chapter; this time those found as regards Cognitive Mobility. Here it was shown that supporting a political party has positive associations with both voting and other forms of political participation, however what was equally shown was that party membership was on the rise. This is currently largely driven by the Labour Party who are engaging individuals interested in politics and giving them a greater say in the way the party is run through their member orientated leadership elections. Providing citizens with a platform by which to engage in politics and the ability to influence the way in which their party of preference runs is likely to increase this level of political interest; an individual whom feels engaged in the political realm and as though they can have a meaningful influence upon it will naturally become more interested within politics generally.

However, this second result equally, returns once again to the idea of education. An educated individual is overwhelming more likely to be interested in politics compared to someone who has little or no educational qualifications and hence increasing education will thus increase the general level of interest in politics across all citizens. As mentioned, the long term nature of such policies means that they are difficult to successfully implement, with no immediate or even short term returns on the investment. However, in the long run any policy which aims to increase either or both of educational participation and attainment will offer a wide range of benefits including, as alluded to, increased political participation both in terms of voting as well as other forms of engagement.

Conclusion:

In order to sum up the findings of this thesis, it is first necessary to revisit the starting point of the study before a brief discussion of what each of the three theories offered in terms of their respective explanatory value. From this it will then be possible to conclude the overall insight this thesis can offer in terms of explaining the phenomena at hand.

There has been two very clear trends in British politics over recent decades. The first of these is that the number of people who choose to turn out to vote at a General Election has experienced a steady decline whereas the second is that there has been an increase in the number of people who are choosing to engage in politics via different means and thus the number of people who have signed a petition, attended a demonstration or joined a protest group has risen noticeably. These trends, particularly the former, can be generalised more broadly across most democracies, however only Britain was considered in this thesis. This thesis therefore assessed three theories in order to understand the causes of these two trends.

The current research in this field points to a range of factors which can affect turnout from demographic variables and the electoral system through to the competitiveness of a particular election and the perceived differences between the parties on offer on the ballot. The prevailing view in the current literature worked on the premise that turnout could largely be attributed to the competitiveness of an election; a claim which stems from the thought that in what is perceived to be a very close or very competitive election, there is an incentive on both the part of the electorate themselves as well as the political parties involved to mobilise voters. Each individual vote becomes more important and thus the potential pivotality of each individual equally increases. However, this explanation does not fit with the global trend of declining turnout. While turnout has generally experienced a steady decline across the world, as Blais (2006) shows, it would be implausible to claim that elections over this period have

seen a decline in their competitiveness. Hence, it is necessary to explain this very unambiguous trend via another means.

Second, while research concerning political participation has undoubtedly broadened its scope in recent years, the primary focus of this has been measured by, and focused upon, the most traditional, formal and institutionalised form of engagement through voting at the ballot box in a General Election. Based on this, the conclusion among the literature is that there has been a decline in political engagement in Britain, rather than just a fall in electoral turnout. This line of thought has been particularly applied to younger generations who, as a stylized fact, vote less than their older counterparts. The flawed way in which this conclusion has been drawn clearly demonstrates the issues as regards the theoretical foundation and methodology within the literature which was criticised for merely choosing to measure what was easy. The field has however developed in recent times and experienced a shift whereby political participation is now viewed far more broadly and as such instead of necessarily suggesting a decline, there is instead a growing belief that there has been an evolution of political engagement and participation. This evolution sees a shift away from citizens merely choosing to express their political views through their vote but instead make use of alternative methods such as petitions, protests and activist groups. By no means are the two types of participation considered mutually exclusive but rather that in terms of individuals primary source of political engagement there has been a shift from the former to the latter.

In a similar way to the reasons for turnout decline, the causes for the increased engagement in this form of politics have been discussed heavily in the literature and has a large focus upon the development of the media and the role which this and more general technological advancements have played in peoples lives and the way they choose to engage in politics. However, what this branch of literature and research fails to investigate is the broader underlying causes of this trend of increased engagement in alternative forms and equally then

how this is linked to the first trend of declining voter turnout. As such, this thesis set out to explain the causes of these two independent, yet interconnected, trends and from this take any concerns this may cause, both presently and in the future, and hence understand the policy implications this holds. In order to achieve an appropriate understanding of these three theories were considered for their explanatory value on trends in British political participation. These three theories will each be discussed in detail both as regards what was originally hypothesized and then the results that were produced when this was subsequently tested statistically.

It is the former trend, of declining electoral turnout which initially poses a concern for the legitimacy of the British political system and the democratic values it works upon.

Democracy as part of its very definition, entails that all citizens have a say in how their county, state, local area or community is run, what the system will provide and for who, as well as how the costs of doing so are shouldered. Therefore should only a declining fraction of the citizens eligible to do so actually choose to take up this right, the legitimacy of the whole system begins to be called into question. While it first may be considered concerning that electoral turnout on the whole is declining, what accentuates this concern is the nature of this decline. First, it has been demonstrated that should an individual not vote at a young age then it is less likely that they will vote later in life either. Second, while a decline in British electoral participation can undoubtedly be observed across all social groups regardless of education, income or gender this is by far most prominent among the most deprived within society. This then creates a very worrying circle of events where because political parties know that these social groups are generally less likely to vote, they do not necessarily particularly look to appeal to them throughout the campaign period prior to elections. They will not create policies which appeal to such groups as they know that they will reap very little electoral reward for doing so and that it may equally come at a cost of alienating groups

who are overwhelmingly likely to vote. Once this begins to happen such social groups will then begin to feel more than ever that none of the political parties on offer fully or even broadly represent either their views or their needs and thus choose not to vote. Hence, the decline in electoral participation in Britain is concerning in itself as regards the legitimacy of the democratic political system however this is made far more concerning when the nature of this decline is considered in more detail and who it will affect most.

Following this evidence of a downward trend in electoral politics, it offers a paradox whereby people on the whole would claim to be interested in politics and the issues of the day, potentially more so than at any other point through history, but they are not engaging in politics. This was the view of much of the literature up until relatively recently when it was accepted that a conception of political engagement which focused solely on voting was not a comprehensive nor accurate one and instead has been broadened to include other forms of political participation such as signing a petition, attending a protest or joining an activist group. Once this has happened it is observable that neither political engagement nor political interest is actually on the decline and instead there has been an evolution of political participation with an increase in these alternative forms of participation. In many ways this trend of increased engagement through these means is an extremely positive one and such forms of participation can undoubtedly help and contribute to a fully functioning and healthy democracy. However, what poses a concern is that these forms of participation are not formalised within the political system and therefore the contribution they make and the degree to which any individual's voice is heard is incredibly ambiguous and difficult to define. Citizens engaging in politics through these forms are by no means guaranteed that their voices and opinions will be listened to in the same way as would be done by casting a vote in an election. The non-institutionalised nature of these forms of participation does not help retrieve the legitimacy the democratic system loses as turnout declines and thus the

evolution of political participation in Britain poses serious issues for the democratic nature of the political system as a whole. While these forms of participation can positively complement voting, they cannot replace it. In many ways this links back to the evolution from a society characterised by Elite Competition to one more in line with a Participatory Citizenship line of thinking. Citizens are now looking to engage in politics through a wider array of means and as such voting becomes the minimum form of political expression as opposed to the maximum form it once was.

As mentioned, in order to understand the causes of these trends and from this what can be done to influence them this thesis investigated three different theories as to whether they held any explanatory power. Each theory will now briefly be outlined along with the results they produced and the interpretations of these before concluding the overall findings of the thesis and what these says about the recent trends experienced in British political participation.

The first theory analysed was Social Capital as conceived by Putnam. This works on the idea that increased societal trust and the networks that people develop as part of this induce greater political engagement. In a society with high levels of generalized trust and where people have wide networks around them through family, work and socially, citizens will feel a civic duty in their lives and therefore they will wish to be broadly involved in civic life, ranging from involvement in local clubs, community groups or volunteering through to believing that it is their duty as a citizen to vote at an election. While Putnam hypothesized that increased Social Capital would increase engagement in civic life very broadly including political participation both through voting as well as other forms, this thesis hypothesized that Social Capital could be used to explain the opposing trends of participation which have been observed in Britain over recent decades. This hypothesis stemmed from the thought that due to a decline in Social Capital, British society has become more individualistic where people no longer possess the civic duty that they may have previously. In turn, citizens will engage

in the political realm in an individualistic manner and merely look to maximise their personal benefit and focus on issues which are important to them rather than always looking to consider the broader societal benefit. Therefore the appeal of voting, as a very civic orientated act, to select a community representative in parliament falls quite substantially whereas the ability to engage very specifically and in an individualistic manner through petitions, demonstrations and protests begins to have a much greater appeal. Under this conception of Putnam's Social Capital it would be possible to explain both of the necessary trends in Britain.

The largest rebuff of Putnam's work comes from Jackman and Miller (1996) who claim that Social Capital has very little, if any, explanatory value in understanding political participation. They believe that there is very little statistical evidence for Putnam's conception and that such a cultural approach makes several unsupported assumptions including that societal attitudes are coherent and only found in the aggregate, as well as assuming that these attitudes are extremely durable, having effects that last for centuries. Equally while there were some criticisms of Putnam's theoretical conception of Social Capital, most notably from Levi (1996) who claims Putnam fails to adequately explain the mechanism by which Social Capital leads to civic engagement, stating rather is he "describing what is and failing to deliver the mechanisms, production, maintenance and growth of Social Capital". This criticism was dismissed on the basis of a game theoretic reasoning forwarded by the likes of Brehm and Rahn (1997) and La Porta et al. (1996).

The results regarding Social Capital showed it to have a degree of explanatory value and that it undoubtedly had something to say in terms of these trends however it could not explain both trends in full. Both the individual as well as combined models showed that generally falling levels of Social Capital, as measured through generalised trust and the length of time someone has lived in their given neighbourhood, will lead to falling levels of civic

engagement, with this holding across both voting as well as other forms of political participation, even if the results on the latter are less conclusive. These results are thus broadly in favour of Putnam's conception of Social Capital and therefore obviously mean that Social Capital, as a theory, fails to fully explain the trends experienced recently in Britain as regards the evolution of political participation. However, this does not stop the theory offering an insight into the trends and therefore it points towards some broad policy implications. Increasing the level of Social Capital in Britain would, from these results, help to increase political engagement and participation, or at least stem the downward trend in electoral turnout. This is very much in line with other academics who have long claimed that where Social Capital can be shaped, developed and mobilised by social policy, this has the potential for positive consequences, both in terms of civic engagement and better government (Hall, 1999; Halpren, 1999; Newton, 1999b; Lowndes & Wilson, 2001). Exactly how to do this is obviously far more ambiguous and contested, however broad policies which expand educational participation, strengthen community cohesion and networks and reduce social exclusion should do this.

The second theory tested in this thesis was Cognitive Mobility theory which was first forwarded by Dalton in an attempt to explain increasing support for European integration and the European Union. However this theory has then later been slightly adapted and applied to the issue of political participation. The starting point for this is that over time people, generally, have become better educated with this particularly noteworthy in Britain due to a host of educational reforms in recent times. As this process has progressed, the number of people who associate with, or are a member of, a political party has fallen dramatically and as this is a strong predictor of whether someone will vote, it has depressed turnout. This is not to say that all these people will not vote, as educated individuals they may well choose to vote but the party which they choose to vote for will be determined by their own internal

calculations of the respective parties' policies and leaders rather than an almost blind support for a particular party whom they vote for regardless of policy platform and without consideration. On the other side of this, as politically aware, educated individuals this new breed of citizens have a greater propensity to engage in other forms of politics such as petitions or protests. First, they now have the ability to engage in these more demanding forms of engagement and second, in the very fast moving political world of today they may well see these as a more effective and potent way to engage in the political sphere. Whereas the electorate are given the choice to vote in a General Election once every five years for a selection of parties, one of which may broadly represent their views, these other types of political participation offer a constant form of engagement and one which an individual can tailor exactly to their beliefs and interests in politics. It presents them with the opportunity to target particular issues, local or national, very specifically in the way they want rather than voting for a party which may have a broadly similar belief on the issue at hand.

The results produced for this theory possess the most explanatory value of the three and hence can offer the most understanding as regards the trends of political participation in Britain where they provide a large amount of insight to both the opposing trends showing a clear holistic cognitive mobilisation notion in favour of these results. While the dramatic fall in party membership in Britain has contributed to depressing turnout, this has been partly offset by the positive impact of increased education which encourages voting and as such the decline in electoral turnout has not been as severe as it may have been. Second, increased education has had a large positive effect on engagement in alternative forms of participation however in this case the negative effect of supporting a political party has capped the increase caused by higher levels of education. In a similar way to that of the first trend, the effect of one variable has, in part, been offset by the other.

Clearly due to the large amount of explanatory value which Cognitive Mobility theory possesses, it is important to draw as much from this as possible in terms of policy implications, and given the nature of the theory these are much more defined than those of Social Capital. First it is again possible to suggest continuing the spread of education in terms of both expanding participation as well as raising attainment levels. Increased education has stemmed the fall in voter turnout as well as increased engagement in other forms of participation and thus such a policy should increase political participation very broadly. Second, a drive to increase party membership can also be suggested from the results. Again, this had a positive association with voting in a General Election as well as other forms of political participation, if to a lesser extent. The way the Labour Party have looked to engage new members since the 2015 General Election demonstrates the willingness to join political parties present in British society, with it also being possible to take the example of the Labour Party as to the ways of encouraging membership.

The third and final of the theories tested within this thesis is General Incentives (Whitely et al. 1994; Whitely and Seyd, 2002) which works on a Downsian style cost-benefit analysis where citizens make calculations about certain variables and incentives and then from this decide whether they will engage or abstain. General Incentives builds directly upon Rational Choice Theory and looks to address and solve the issue of the participation paradox which plagues its predecessor. Whereas Rational Choice includes the pivotality – the chance that their personal vote will prove to be the decisive one - of an individual's vote or engagement, General Incentives instead includes the idea of political efficacy, which is a measure as to what extent an individual feels politically influential. The more politically influential that an individual feels, logically the more inclined they will be to exercise that influence. This offers a more relevant measure than that of pivotality, which in the modern day of enormous electorates has become relatively meaningless. Under a First Past The Post system even what

would be considered a marginal seat would still be won by several hundred votes meaning the pivotality of an individual vote is incredibly small even there. Obviously the majority of constituencies in the UK would be considered safe seats with one party winning by a margin of several thousand. In this case, the pivotality is even less relevant. The second difference between General Incentives compared to Rational Choice Theory is the additional incentives that the theory adds, which again helps to remove the participation paradox. These include Individual Benefits, Group Benefits, System Benefits and Social Norms, each of which has the potential to effect an individual's decision on whether or not to engage. While under Rational Choice, engaging in any group activity is not going to have any realistic effect as adding one extra individual will change very little; what General Incentives looks to do however is to shift this outlook to instead consider the group as a whole where in this case, an individual will have a rational preference to participate in a "group orientated way" (Olson, 1965) and as such the calculation of benefits over perceived costs will change and the participation paradox is removed.

Despite appearing to have a foundation grounded in logic, General Incentives has attracted some criticism regarding its applicability to the real world rather than merely applying it theoretically. This largely surrounds the thought that while in an ideal world an individual would create this calculation and thus make a rational decision based on this, the average citizen simply does not have the ability to do this and therefore the theory lacks any real world application. However, as was shown with Cognitive Mobility, the British electorate are increasingly educated and politically engaged and hence it is plausible to claim that many citizens do in fact make a calculation very similar to the one outlined here, where they weight up the costs and benefits of engaging politically. The thought that citizens do not have access to all the relevant information to make this calculation is equally becoming far less relevant in a world dominated by twenty four hour news, social media and technology. The cost of

accessing relevant information has fallen dramatically to the point where in terms of gaining access the cost could only be described as marginal. No matter where someone is or what they are doing, up to the minute news is now available at the press of a button.

The results for this final theory are potentially the least insightful of those found within this thesis. They offer only a limited, yet interesting, insight into the former trend of a decline in electoral turnout, however it offers far less as regards the second trend where engagement in alternative forms of politics is on the increase. Once the General Incentives Model is refined slightly in order to resemble a more Selective Incentives Model, it is then that the theory begins to offer some insight into the decline in voter turnout in Britain, however, even at this stage it would be incorrect to claim that such a model could explain the rise in alternative forms of participation. In terms of voting, the perceived benefits have fallen, the perceived costs have increased and the perceived System Benefits have fallen and given each of these three variables proved to be significant this offers noteworthy insight. These results each suggest a decline in voting turnout and therefore stand in line with the current trends observed in Britain. Thus General Incentives can only partially explain one of the trends.

Hence, due to the lack of explanatory power this set of results possesses, the policy implications that it is possible to draw from them are equally limited, however there is one result of interest which can be looked at specifically. System Benefits proved to be positively significant on both trends when the variables were tested individually as well as in the voting combined model and thus a shift in this view has the potential to increase participation of all kinds. The more a citizen believes that it is everyone's duty to vote in an election, the more likely it is that they will have voted in the last General Election as well as engaged in other forms of political participation. This therefore returns to an almost Social Capital form of thinking where it is necessary to increase peoples civic duty and in turn this will impact the degree to which they agree that it is every citizens duty to vote in an election. As was

discussed in relation to Social Capital, the way to increase this is difficult to state with any level of certainty although broad policies which look to expand educational participation and attainment as well as ones which look to reduce social divisions and build community networks and cohesion will help to increase Social Capital.

Overall, it is clear from the above results that while each of the three theories has something to say, to differing degrees, about the two trends observed in British political participation, the theory of Cognitive Mobility offers the most insight as to the causes of these. Generally, citizens in Britain are now more educated than was previously the case and as such there has been a clear trend of partisan dealignment, which has depressed electoral turnout, although educational increases have offset this somewhat. Education has equally increased an individual's propensity to engage in other forms of political participation, although on the reverse, this trend has been offset by the decline in partisan alignment. Citizens have slowly evolved to become much closer to Schumpeter's (1950) ideal citizen and this in turn has impacted the way in which they choose to engage in the political realm.

However, despite the very differing levels of explanatory power these theories hold as well as the very different approaches which they take in attempting to explain these trends, there is a strong common ground within their findings. The results of all three theories suggest that education will have a positive effect on political participation in the broadest sense. This is obviously most prominent in the second theory of Cognitive Mobility which has its very foundations in increased educational attainment but this equally applies, to a lesser extent, in each of the other two theories as well. Education has been shown to have an effect already in Britain and can continue to be a positive influence on political participation in Britain. As previously discussed, how to actually form these policies and implement them successfully still leaves a huge amount of uncertainty largely due to the long term nature of the policies required. Even with the recent success of education policies broadly in the UK there remains

a great deal of debate as to the best way to run the education system; the means of doing this and what produces the best outcomes as well as how the success of any given educational system should be defined and measured.

As has been mentioned throughout this thesis, a policy which looks to achieve increased educational participation or attainment will not be a short term fix and will take years, decades or even generations to successfully implement and reap the rewards from. The long term nature of any policy which regards education is not too concerning in the sense that the rewards will not be seen immediately as it remains a popular electoral policy and therefore even in the increasingly short term world of modern politics, parties will still choose to run on such policies. However, what poses slightly more of a concern is that this electoral decline is already well on its way. Over the last few decades there has been a steady decline in turnout at British General Elections and the long term nature of this trend suggests it is likely to continue. Should this decline continue and the means by which it can be reversed only be done on a long term basis this suggests that in terms of turnout, it is likely to get worse before it gets better. The fact that age remains a strong predictor of voting in Britain poses a concern for this as it shows certain generational tendencies whereby it is unlikely that as the current younger generations grow older they will in turn become voters, instead it is suggested that they will remain non voters. Currently, at around 60% there is little question as to the legitimacy of the system and although it would be wrong to speculate as to at what level of turnout the legitimacy of an election becomes seriously questioned, if electoral turnout fell much further than it already has this would increasingly become an issue.

As well as increasing participation broadly across all forms of political engagement and across all social groups, increasing educational participation and attainment will equally help to close the gap in inequality of participation which currently plagues the electoral decline in Britain, as well as generally across the world. As Lever (2010) showed, declining turnout is

most prominent among the most deprived in society and this creates further problems compared to merely the general decline in turnout. Therefore it is important that not only does increasing education tackle the overall decline in electoral turnout but equally the most concerning part of it in the inequality which it harbours and potentially conceals. As stated, currently there is a widely proven and accepted fact of political participation that in terms of traditional, or institutionalised, forms there are very unequal levels of engagement as defined by education, class, gender and age (Parry et al., 1992; Teorell et al., 2007a; Verba et al., 1995), however such policies have the ability to change this.

Should such a group of policies be put in place over the long term in Britain there is no reason that the decline in electoral turnout cannot be halted and to some extent reversed as well as also continuing to increase the level of engagement in alternative forms participation such as through petitions, protests and demonstrations. British democracy can continue to be a leading light to the rest of the world and be characterised as a very healthy democracy which has an active electorate both formally in terms of turnout at each General Elections as well as more continuous forms of participation like those mentioned above where citizens can have an almost constant engagement in the political sphere. It does not have to be a contest between the two forms or types of participation but rather they can complement one another and the more engagement in each the better for the overall health of the democratic system as a whole. In this sense it is possible to confirm the thought that Britain can largely be characterised by the Participatory Citizenship model rather than that of Elite competition. Citizens do not have the very low level of intellect suggested by the latter model and nor do they have the very limited capacity to improve as was equally suggested by the model. Instead, generally speaking, citizens are now, and increasingly so, knowledgeable and civic minded individuals where voting in an election provides the minimum expression of citizenship. Therefore citizens have the opportunity to make a wide range of positive

contributions politically and further to do so in an environment where participation creates a positive feedback loop, whereby good citizenship begets good citizenship. Also, by the very nature of this model, there is almost unlimited scope for both individual citizens as well as society as a whole to continue to increasingly engage in the political realm over time, in terms of both quantity as well as quality, and thus continue to grow as a healthy democracy.

In terms of further research, this thesis has considered Britain very specifically and therefore it would be wrong to generalise these findings across other countries or apply the results to other cases. Hence, further research is required as to whether these results can be extended across other democracies or alternatively whether these differ from the British case. Given the number of factors which impact an individual's choice to vote or abstain and the fact that no democracy or political system is identical would suggest that different results may well be produced depending on the nation state considered. Without further research it would be impossible to confirm as regards other cultures, electoral systems or democracies.

Secondly, given the conclusive nature of the results as regards the policies which they suggest in order to increase political participation of all kinds, it is crucial to further understand the optimal manner in which to implement appropriate education policies and the strategies to do this successfully. While Britain currently has an enviable education system and attempts to improve both participation and attainment in recent times have been broadly successful, it is important that these trends are continued.

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